WOMAN AS INDIVIDUAL IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA

A Defiance of the Masculine Code

CAROL HANSEN

American University Studies

PETER LANG

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Dedication

In memory of Professor John Doebler, Arizona State University, an inspiration.

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Preface

The woman question has reappeared, but the controversy over woman is not new; it reaches back to the sixteenth century and before, and was reflected in the drama and non-dramatic treatises of the day. In Elizabethan drama we find women characters caught in the maze of the masculine code, a psychological mind-set based upon anti-feminist stereotyping. Although the women characters vary in terms of defying this code—some to the point of being considered heroes in their own right—usually their attempts at autonomy prove short-lived. In the tragedies they usually die; in the comedies they live felicitously in disguise, but often this device proves more panache than panacea. Only in another culture, the Egyptian, does one character, Cleopatra, successfully defy the masculine control of Rome to emerge as a woman equal in authority, largely because she has the cult of Isis to back her. If Shakespeare, Webster, Heywood, and Middleton could find no final resolution to the problem of woman in a male-dominated society, they could, nonetheless, ask the right questions about her predicament. They could show that the masculine code led to disintegration, defiance, and death for women, and to madness for men. And they could show that, against a generalized image of archetypal Eve, woman could emerge as an individual, in the words of Travis Bogard, as a "splendid fighter for self."

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I

Introduction

In an attempt to understand the underlying assumptions held during the Age of Elizabeth, E. M. W. Tillyard summarizes the hierarchy of order in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, which begins with God on the first tier, followed by the angels, and ending with the placement of animals, plants, and minerals at the bottom.[1] As in the medieval framework, man was placed somewhere between God and the animals, and being neither one nor the other became his predicament. Hamlet articulates his own ambiguous response to man's position when, in his speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he says:

> What [a] piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals, and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.[2]
>
> (II.ii.303-10)

Added to this ambiguous placement in the hierarchy of order—enough to create a kind of schizophrenia—came the vexing problem of the position of woman, which failed to delight not only Hamlet, but most men of the period as well. Tillyard makes no explicit reference to her placement in the hierarchy, which may be seen as an index to his assumption that she somehow belonged to man's status, but, in fact, that assumption is not wholly true. When reading "The 2nd Tome on the State of Matrimonie," in *Homilies* (Church of England), *Certaine Sermons Appointed by the Queenes Majestie, to be Declared and Read, by All Parsons, Vicars, and Curates* (London, 1595), we find a reference to woman's subservient position in respect to her husband:

> You husbandes, deale with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour to the wife, as unto the weaker vessell. This precepte doeth particularly pertaine to the husbande, for hee ought to be the leader and authour of love, in cherishing and increasing concord, which then shall take place, if he wil use measurablenes and not tyranny, and if he yeelde something to the woman. For the woman is a weak creature, not indued with like strength and constancy of minde, therefore they bee the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of minde, more than men bee, and lighter they bee, and more vaine in their fantasy and opinions.

If the tone of this homily "On Matrimony" patronizes woman, labelling her as "weake and vaine," the effect of *Genesis* is thunderous in its implications of placing the fall of all mankind upon the shoulders of Eve, the archetypal woman. In the heated exchange between God, Adam, and Eve, we find the following classic example of incrimination (3.11-17):

> And he said, Who tolde thee, that thou
> wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tre,
> where of I comanded The that thou shuldèst
> not eat in no case?
>
> Then the man said, The woman which thou
> gauest to be with me, she gave me of the
> tre, and I did eat.
>
> Then the Lord God said to the serpēt,
> Because thou hast done this, thou art
> cursed above all cattel, and above everie
> beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt
> thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the
> days of thy life.
>
> I will also put enimitie betwene thee and
> the woma, betwene thy side and her side.
> He shal breake thine head, and thou
> shalt bruise his heele.
>
> Unto the woman he said, I wil greately
> increase thy sorrows, and thy conceptiōs.
> In sorrow shalt thou bring forthe childrē,
> And thy desire shal be subject to thine
> husband, and he shal rule over thee.
>
> Also to Adam he saide, Because thou hast
> obeyed the voyce of thy wife, and hast
> eaten of the tre, (whereof I comanded

> the, saying, thou shalt not eat of it)
> cursed is the earth for thy sake; in
> sorow shalt thou eate of it all the
> dayes of thy life.

The *Bible* (Geneva, 1560), from which the above quotation is taken, was most popular among the people, and according to Richmond Noble in *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge*, was one of the versions read by Shakespeare, the other being *The Bishop's Bible*.[3] *The Geneva Bible* was famous or infamous for its glosses. For example, after Genesis 1.26 we find: "Furthermore God saide, Let vs make man in our[t] lickeness, & let them rule over the fish of the sea, & over the foule of the heaven, & over the beastes, & over all the earth, & over everie thing that crepeth & moueth on the earth" with the gloss on [t] following: "This image and licknes of God in man is expounded *Ephes* 4.24; where it is write, y[t] man was created after God in righteousnes & true holines, meaning by these two wordes as wisdome, truth, innocencie, power" (2). This insistence of man being made in the image of God and therefore "God-like" serves, it seems to me, as one basis for man's belief in male dominance. The following verse, which might be labelled more equalitarian in its treatment of the sexes, significantly has no gloss: "Thus God created he him: he created them male & female" (2).

The dominant image of woman—seen in the guise of Eve in *Genesis*—is thus clearly a negative one, although, admittedly, there are other positive images found in the *Bible* as a whole, among them Judith, Ruth, and, of course, the Virgin Mary, whose cult was especially strong in the Middle Ages, serving as an idealized counter-image to the ambiguous, but largely negative one of Eve.

But if not the only biblical image, Eve is the initial one, and it is this image of woman as weak and guilty, this punishment of her by biblical authority, which is, it seems to me, the central one in the English Renaissance. And, while the sonneteers were working on a Petrarchan or Neoplatonic portrait, the many faces of Eve appear to have been transferred to the drama of the day, so that the authority of the male figure, be it in the form of the father, husband, brother or fiancé, is domi-

nant, and the woman is placed in the perilous position of either passively accepting the male code of supremacy, subtly circumventing it, or actively defying it.

Moreover, Ted Hughes maintains in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* that Shakespeare's life-long quest was to restore the maligned goddess—the feminine principle—in all of his works, which is my thesis as well. To Hughes,

> The inner identification of Shakespeare's Goddess with the archaic Goddess of the Catholic world, and with his own mother, suggests that in so far as he was a shaman of that type, for that tradition, he was indeed not merely crypto-Catholic but committed to Catholicism with an instinct that amounted to fanatic heroism. The great shaman is the one who, as if involuntarily, lives a martyrdom to the defeated cause. This explains in just what way the sequence of tragic plays, and even his whole oeuvre, can be seen as Shakespeare's record of the sufferings of the Goddess (very much, as it happens, like the sufferings depicted in *Satan in Goray*), and his heroic, lifelong, patient attempt to rescue the Female—in some way or other to salvage the Goddess.[4]

It is my contention that the leading dramatists of the day did not accept the image of woman as found in *Genesis* and that, in their hands, heroines became not weak and vain, but strong in their struggle to emerge not as they appeared behind the male backdrop of a generalized portrait of Eve, but as they themselves were as individuals. Thus while well aware of the long tradition of anti-feminism, which goes back to the story of Eve and reappears in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Shakespeare, Middleton, and Webster, among the most notable playwrights, time and again appear to question this tradition, and ultimately to reverse it.

The supreme irony, of course, is that a woman, Elizabeth I, was running the whole show or, to be more precise, the whole country. Revered as the Virgin Queen, and a fierce example of femininity, she may be said to serve as a model for an alternate image of woman. For, although capable of vanity, the epithet of "weak" in terms of courage hardly applies.[5] In her forty-five year reign, a heated controversy over the position of woman was taking place. And, according to Louis B. Wright, Elizabeth's sex played a major role in awakening an interest in the subject of woman.[6]

On the one hand were conservatives who voiced biblical scripture to reinforce their anti-feminist sentiments; among them, Joseph Swetnam in *The Araignment of Lewde, idle, froward and unconstant women* (1615), and John Knox in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558). On the other, were men like Sir Thomas Elyot, who wrote *A Defence of Good Women* (1545) and Daniel Tuvil, whose *Asylum Veneris or a Sanctuary for Ladies* (1616) is an encomium on women.

Although such debate over women was nothing new, having as it did strong classical and medieval precedents, the controversy over woman appears to have reached its height in the sixteenth century. In *The Crooked Rib, An Analytical Index to the Argument About Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568*, Francis Utley maintains that "The Middle Ages did not give birth to the controversy over women any more than it did to love itself. . . . Greece and Rome made their contributions as well as the Orient; and the most prolific age of English satire on women is the sixteenth century, when Renaissance and Reformation were in vigorous motion."[7]

But the battle for a positive image of woman was no easy task when one considers the fervor, both religious and political, of such disciples of male superiority as John Knox. Writing more out of fear of the rule of the Catholic Mary than of the more moderate Elizabeth, Knox pontificates against what he considers to be the unnatural state of female rule, and cites the ubiquitous St. Paul for biblical support:

> First, I say, that woman in her greatest perfection, was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him: As sainte Paule doth reason in these words. Man is not of the woman but the woman of the man. And man was not created for the cause of woman, but the woman for the cause of man, and therefore oght the woman to have a power upon her head (that is a coverture in signe of subjection). Of whiche words it is plaine that the Apostle meaneth, that woman in her greatest perfection shuld have knowen, that man was Lord above her: and therefore that she shulde never have pretended any kinde of superioritie above him, no more than do the angels above Gode the creator, or above Christ Jesus their head. So, I say, that in her greatest perfection woman was created to be subject to man. But after her fall and rebellion committed against God, their [sic] was put upon her a newe necessitie, and she was made subject to many by the irrevocable sentence of God.[8]

The statement by Knox is more than a curiosity, for in the phrase "that woman in her greatest perfection shuld have knowen, that man was Lord above her," a fusion of the biblical and the secular conservative attitude toward woman has emerged. That is, in the hierarchy of creation, man has adopted the superior stance of being "Lord above her." As God is above man—that ambiguous position—man can at least be Lord over something, and the most probable choice appeared to be that creature which was supposedly created expressly for him: woman. If man could not be God, he was most definitely man, and could be *like* a God, over woman. And woman then could be neatly posited as neither man nor animal, but again be placed in that ambiguous position of being in between. The important thing was that he was "Lord above her," and that she was, as Touchstone says, "a poor thing, but my own."

Knox's last sentence—"But after her fall and rebellion committed against God, their [sic] was put upon her a newe necessitie, and she was made subject to many by the irrevocable sentence of God" articulates a tide of popular conservative sentiment, which undercuts the idealized Petrarchan image which had recently evolved, and opens up the counter image which springs from the Biblical and Medieval tradition—like Satan, it is the dark face of Eve who "rebelled," and who "was made subject to many by the irrevocable sentence of God." Of course, nothing is said here about Adam.

Thus did the interpretation prove more dangerous for women than the biblical indictment. But while still maintaining a firm belief in the concept of order, among the Elizabethan playwrights, Shakespeare most notably was to repeatedly demolish man's arrogance in his treatment of women, so much so that woman was often portrayed as a rebel, but one with a cause. She struggled against the assumptions of the masculine code which restricted her thought and actions and reduced her degree of autonomy.

Thus was the popular controversy over woman reflected in the drama of the day. An increased interest appears in the role of woman who had traditionally been kept in her place by the patronizing protection of a male figure, usually, a father,

husband, or guardian. The tradition of male dominance was most strikingly presented perhaps in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, where the role of the jealous male custodian was given to a Venetian named Pantalone. Whether or not there is a direct correlation between the Italian tradition and the Elizabethan is difficult to gauge. What remnants we may have, however, are a repeated cluster of triads, which by repetition, become a literary pattern in which a dictatorial father, fiancé, or husband, is quickened to suspicious outrage by the thoughts, actions, or mere existence, of a woman character, usually a daughter, fiancée, or wife.

How the woman character reacts to this domination marks her either as a passive victim or a comic or tragic heroine, and the spectrum of roles for women is wide—ranging from the passive and conventional Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Ophelia in *Hamlet*; to those who endure humiliation and false accusations to emerge as viable heroines, as Cordelia in *King Lear*, Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, and the Duchess in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*; to those who impose false standards of what it is to be a man upon their husband or son, as do Lady Macbeth and Volumnia; to those who wilfully outrage all standards and turn defiance into decadence, as does Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*, and finally to others of a more spritely temperament who escape from the role of sexual stereotypes by donning the clothes of boys (a double reversal, of course, in that the women parts were played by boys in the Renaissance; a double standard, too, in that no actresses were allowed on stage), and thereby become initiates into the male world and active agents as do Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Viola in *Twelfth Night*, and, to a diminished degree, Imogen in *Cymbeline*.

It shall be my purpose to trace the growing emergence of strong women characters in selected plays from English Renaissance Drama, with a progression from the dominant male/submissive female role and the authority of father and husband to the emergence of the strong or defiant woman and, finally, to a partial resolution found in the image of the disguised woman as equal or friend. An epilogue will deal with the transcendence of the code in the spiritual marriage of

Antony and Cleopatra where, only in the differing and non-Western culture of Egypt, are the proponents of the masculine and feminine principles allowed to co-exist and function as equal entities, largely because of Cleopatra's identification with the goddess Isis.[9]

If Shakespeare, Webster, Heywood, and Middleton could find no final resolution to the problem of woman in a male-dominated society, they could, nevertheless, ask the right questions about her predicament in it. They could show in the tragedies that the masculine code led to disintegration, defiance, and death for women, and to madness for men. Although the plays were written by men, the fact that they were artists freed them to write about the predicament of woman with great insight.

While imagining a feminine genius equal to Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf could write three hundred years later,

> I told you . . . that Shakespeare had a sister, but do not look for her in Sir Sidney Lee's life of the poet. She died young—alas, she never wrote a word. . . . But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her. For my belief is that if we live another century or so . . . and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think . . . then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. . . . I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile.[10]

To this premise, the book is dedicated.

Notes

1. E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943). *Cf.* Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936) for a more extensive treatment of the subject.

2. William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare* ed. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Unless specifically noted, all subsequent references to Shakespeare's plays will be from this edition.

3. Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 75-76.

4. Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 90.

5. While Elizabeth could compete with Mary, Queen of Scots, for example, in reference to the whiteness of her complexion, hers being whiter, the Scottish Queen's "very lusime"—a testimony to her vanity —she could also be the image of courage as when on August 8, 1588, before the defeat of the Spanish Armada, she is described by Leicester as being "full of princely resolution and more than feminine courage [as] she passed like some Amazonian empress through all her army." J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 129; 308. But the fact that she is described as having "more than feminine courage" reinforces the low opinion held of women in general.

6. Louis B. Wright, "The Popular Controversy over Woman," in *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, Huntington Library Publications (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 466. See 465-507 for a detailed history of the debate.

7. Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib, An Analytical Index to the Argument About Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Press, 1944), 5.

8. John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) in *The English Scholar's Library*, I, No. 2, ed., Edward Arber (1898; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1967), 15.

9. For a virtuoso examination of Shakespeare's preoccupation with the theme of The Great Goddess in his canon, see Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

10. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; rpt. London: Penguin, 1972), 111-112.

II

The Masculine Code

Authority of the Father

To define the term "masculine code" is not to turn to a list of dramatic conventions, although the repetition of the dominant, if not domineering, male who controls the actions of the submissive female is frequent enough, I think, to warrant the inclusion of this term as a paradigm in English Renaissance Drama. Often the pattern is more implicit than explicit; that is, it lies beneath the texture of the drama, in the male characters' attitudes towards the women characters, and tends to surface when the woman attempts to assert herself, either in thought or action. As suggested earlier in reference to the characters in the Italian *commedia dell'arte* (although the code was by no means limited to comic treatment), the code is chiefly concerned with the ostensible protection of a young woman by her father or other male guardian, who dictates the choice of her husband as well as her general manner of life. As a means of insuring her virtue—and her marriageability, which in the Elizabethan context could be read as her marketability—the young woman is carefully watched, so that no slur might come upon the family name. At the slightest suggestion of her self-assertiveness, either in the choice of a husband or an independent life, deep suspicion is aroused and her virtue is often called into question, releasing an avalanche of unbecoming epithets, or the threat of death. In a sense, man—first as father, then as fiancé or husband—appears to serve as the representative of God in this context, for he is supposedly all powerful and capable of wreaking his wrath and revenge upon her, should she disobey his commands.[1]

Even in a comedy such as *A Midsummer's Night Dream* the threat of death or a convent is held over Hermia when she attempts to choose the man she loves against the dictates of Egeus, her father. His command is clear:

> Either to die the death, or to abjure
> For ever the society of men.
> Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
> Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
> Whether (if you yield not to your father's choice)
> You will endure the livery of a nun,
> For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd
> To live a barren sister all your life,
> Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
> (I.i.65-73)

Happily, neither alternative—death, or life as a vestal virgin—proves true, and Hermia does end up after that strange night in the forest with Lysander, the man of her choice. But the magic of Midsummer's Eve comes only once a year, although Quiller-Couch can conclude in his lecture on "Paternity in Shakespeare" that Shakespeare's sympathy lies with the lovers when he says that in "drawing your attention to the considerable business of paternity in the Plays I do not suggest that it compares for a moment with the mastery of young love, which is Shakespeare's constant talisman to confront and overpower it even when it wields the authority of Prospero's wand."[2]

In *Romeo and Juliet*, however, Capulet's insistence upon Paris as Juliet's husband proves disastrous. And his tone is far less kindly than Egeus'—and more representative of the masculine stance—when he erupts over the suggestion that Juliet will not do as he says:

> How! will she none? doth she not give us thanks?
> Is she not proud? doth she not count her blest,
> Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought
> So worthy a gentleman to be her bride?
> (III.v.142-145)

When Juliet answers in a respectful, though resolute manner:

> Not proud you have, but thankful that you have.
> Proud can I never be of what I hate;

> But thankful even for hate that is meant love.
> (III.v.146-148)

Capulet grows enraged; his words swirl into epithets:

> How now, how now, chopp'd logic! What is this?
> 'Proud,' and 'I thank you,' and 'I thank you not'
> And yet 'not proud,' mistress minion you?
> Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,
> But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next,
> To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,
> Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.
> Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage!
> You tallow-face!
> (III.v.149-156)

"'Carrion,' 'baggage,' 'tallow-face'"—all reflect an increasing verbal violence which erupts when the father is not obeyed with docile submissiveness. When Lady Capulet adds, "Fie, fie, what are you mad?" he roars on. And, although Capulet is either a fool or senile or both, his stance is typically that of the enraged father. For even the more judicious Cymbeline retorts to his daughter in a very late play: "O thou vile one!" when Imogen reveals her marriage to Posthumus, the man of her choice. Cymbeline chooses Cloten, the boorish, would-be rapist. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that the father is not always correct.

Besides, Capulet, Egeus, and Cymbeline, there are other father figures who cast a negative vote on the daughter's choice of a husband. These include the Duke of Milan in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, who elects the wealthy, but foolish and cowardly Thurio over Silvia's choice of Valentine, with whom, after a rather involved debate over love and friendship, and the less than courtly attempts at her honor by Proteus, she is finally reunited.

The most felicitous unions, however, do seem to result when the father's and daughter's choice coincide, as in the case of Portia who, while critical of her father's stricture of using the caskets in determining the right husband, is thus shielded from false suitors and ends with Bassanio, her choice. Similarly, in *As You Like It*, Duke Senior's remark that "The Duke my father lov'd his father dearly," when referring to Orlando,

almost insures the two lovers of a happy marriage. *The Taming of the Shrew* finds an exasperated father giving Katherina to the only willing suitor. And Prospero's strictures against a premature consummation of the love between Ferdinand and Miranda, and his ultimate blessing of the union, provide perhaps the clearest example of the traditional role where a father's blessing insures a happy marriage.

But other anomalies also appear. What of the daughters who have no fathers? How do they fare? Rather well, it appears. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, for example, the father of the Princess of France does not appear. With the announcement of his death, a certain pall is placed over the comedy, but it is a seriousness that is already integral to the character of the Princess who then pronounces that all marriages must be postponed for one year's time, thus allowing the somewhat immature males to grow up.

Similarly, in *Much Ado About Nothing* Beatrice's father is dead. While under the ostensible protection of Leonato (who, we will remember, initially treated his daughter none too kindly by believing the reports of her philandering), Beatrice appears to gain a clear-sightedness—if a bit overly critically—of the men about her, and ultimately sees for herself that Benedict, beneath his bachelorly pose, is the real man in the play. Thus it appears that Shakespeare is offering no clear-cut endorsement of the paternal role per se, but is presenting a kaleidoscopic vision of various alternatives.

In a treatise called *A Bartholomew Fairing* by John Stockwood, which is a manual of sorts for the raising of children in Elizabethan England, the author cites St. Paul as an authority on the question of obedience owed by children to parents:

> St. Paule in his epistle unto the collossians, willeth children to bee obedient unto their parents in al things, & giveth a reason therof saying, *For that is well pleasing unto the Lord*. Out of this place I reason after this manner, to proove that the good wil of the parents must be sought for & obtained by the children in their contracts of marriage. Whatsoever pleaseth God, the same ought of al children to be practiced so far foorth as it concerneth their place & calling: but to marie with the consent of parents is a thing that pleaseth God, therefore children in their mariages ought to have the consent & allowance of their parents.[3]

This is the kind of conventional advice that parents sought and ostensibly followed in Elizabethan England, and it is repeatedly represented in the authoritarian tone used by fathers to subject their children, and especially their daughters, to their rule. Yet in Shakespeare's plays a curious question seems to be evolving, which is: what are the limits of the father's authority, and is it always "right" that the child obey? Of course, had Cordelia and Desdemona and Juliet dutifully obeyed their fathers, there would not have been a tragedy based upon the conflict, and we would have been left with no such masterpieces. That they did rebel, however—and that our sympathies rest largely with them—suggest a questioning of parental rule when it is carried to extremes, past the limits of reason. When the rule of the father becomes absolute, a reaction in the name of higher laws—principally those of love or self-knowledge—appears to emerge.

Significantly, in his advice to parents taken from Saint Paul, Stockwood failed to mention that following the admonition, "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord," there follows a reciprocal injunction: "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (*Colossians* 3.21).

This omission by Stockwood reinforces the strength of the patriarchy in Renaissance England. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch summarizes the force of this tradition in his *Annual Shakespeare Lecture from the Proceedings of the British Academy* as follows:

> Whatever may have happened among other races, among those we separate and classify under the term 'Indo-European' social order derives, so far back as can be traced, from the Family, with its Father as head, lawgiver, justiciar, administrator of its possessions. In ancient policy this is not yet law as we understand it, being older than any writing and therefore older than any code. But it is Custom, the rule of the Patriarch, filially binding. The Mother, if imported from another tribe, is but an adjunct; if of the same tribe, yet but a servant over lesser servants as proud mother of the legitimate children, of whom the eldest male even remains a servant while his father lives and for misconduct can be sold into slavery by an incensed father's will.[4]

For the fate of the undutiful daughter, one may substitute the word "death." Let us turn now to a play where the defi-

ance of a father's wishes is dazzlingly overt and where she dies, if not by intention, by default. I refer to *King Lear*, in which a father's fury brings tragedy both to himself and that daughter he loved most.

Or so it would appear that Cordelia defies her father. Certainly she puts Lear off guard by pronouncing the unexpected "Nothing" to the old King's query, "What can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?" But the audience's reaction to this speech is tempered by her previous asides. When her sisters fawningly attest to their filial devotion, Cordelia's comment, "What shall Cordelia speak? / Love, and be silent." And "Then poor Cordelia! / And yet not so, since I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" softens the austerity of her reply to Lear. Further, though the "Nothing" speech appears defiant, her rationale for speaking as she does is strictly traditional. When she says, "I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less," she is reechoing traditional Elizabethan thought of due obedience to the authority of the father. But, as she points out, obedience was also due to one's husband—the father could not always have all. "Good my lord," she begins:

> You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
> Return these duties back as are right fit,
> Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
> Why have my sisters husbands if they say
> They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,
> That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
> Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
> Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
> [To love my father all].
>
> (I.i.95-103)

Cordelia's speech is reminiscent of Desdemona's, who vowed love to both her father and her new husband:

> My noble father,
> I do perceive here a divided duty:
> To you I am bound for life and education;
> My life and education both do learn me
> How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
> I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;
> And so much duty as my mother show'd

To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor, my lord.
(*Othello* I.iii.180-189)

When Lear asks, "So young, and so untender?" Cordelia answers, "So young, my lord, and true." Indeed everything she says is "true" by the standards of Elizabethan thought. One point of the play seems to be that Lear cannot distinguish between the limits of his authority nor his true daughter from his false. The irony is that those who now show most obedience to his authority are those who will later defy any authority Lear has left, while Cordelia, who appears to initially defy the authority of her father, is the only daughter to show true obedience throughout the ensuing action. What Cordelia does defy, however, is the masculine code of absolute authority which her father is to inflict upon her.

Seeking a reason behind Lear's anger at her, Cordelia implores her father:

I yet beseech your Majesty—
If for I want that glib and oily art,
To speak and purpose not; since what I well intend,
I'll do before I speak—that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonoured step,
That hath depriv'd me of your grace and favour;
But even for want of that for which I am richer—
A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.
(I.i.223-233)

But Lear is resolute; it is as if, in his mind, she has committed an "unchaste action, or dishonoured step." Like Brabantio, he quickly delivers the paternal curse:

Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd,
As thou my sometime daughter.
(I.i.113-119)

As a patriarch, Lear sees himself betrayed by a defiant daughter who, in reality, is most dutiful. Only France and Kent perceive the truth of the situation, which Kent describes to Lear:

> What wouldest thou do, old man?
> Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
> When power to flattery bows? To plainness honor's bound,
> When majesty falls to folly. Reverse thy doom;
> And, in my best consideration, check
> This hideous rashness: answer my life and judgement,
> The youngest daughter does not love thee least;
> Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds
> Reverb no hollowness.
> (I.i.146-153)

Cordelia's parting words reflect a keen assessment of the situation. As she addresses her fawning sisters, she ends the speech with a prophetic end-rhyme:

> The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
> Cordelia leaves you. I know you what you are,
> And like a sister am most loath to call
> Your faults as they are named. Use well our father;
> To your professed bosoms I commit him:
> But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,
> I would prefer him to a better place.
> (I.i.268-274)

In the light of such reasonableness and concern, why, then, the fury of Lear? It has often been suggested that his rage stems from feelings of being slighted, of not having been shown proper respect, as well as his public exposure and humiliation. And, from Lear's viewpoint, this may appear true initially for presumably he, unlike the audience, does not hear Cordelia's important and qualifying asides. Nevertheless, Lear delivers the paternal curse prematurely—at line 113—and must repent in torment.

A more precise explanation might be the reversal of his expectations. Because he loved Cordelia best, he assumed that she would, in grand form and ceremony amongst the assemblage of the court, respond most eloquently of her love for him. When this expectation is dashed by her strange begin-

ning of "Nothing," Lear's professed love for her is dashed to disillusionment and he opts for the conventional patriarchal curse. Lear wants outward show; Cordelia inward truth. It is not an accident, I think, that, in the end, Albany, with the bodies of Lear and Cordelia at this feet, is allowed to say:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey;
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say:
> (V.iii.324-325)

In short, the play ends simply and with the idea that we must speak truthfully, not ceremoniously—a reversal of the pomp demanded and displayed in Act One.

In *King Lear* the question of the authority of the father is archly presented in the opening act. A concommitant question follows: How far does the authority of the father extend? What boundaries exist? To demand absolute fidelity, as Lear appears to do, proves to be the beginning of the end of any authority he may have had. Cordelia alone clearly defines her terms—to love her father, as custom and the bond ascribe. When this proves unpalatable to Lear, his emotional reaction of departing with his lands and thus giving up all authority, begets his downfall. In effect, Lear asks for too much authority and adulation, and ends with none; in wanting all, he ends with nothing.

Thus, in examining "The Method of the Dialogue" in *King Lear*, Harley Granville-Barker can conclude: "For more reasons and in more directions than one, Shakespeare seeks strength in simplicity in the writing of *King Lear*. The noble conventional speech of its beginning will not serve him long, for this is the language of such an authority as Lear discards. There is needed an expression of those fiercer, cruder strengths which come into play when a reign of order ends and a moral code is broken."[5]

In terms of lines alloted to the character, Cordelia's are almost absurdly minimal: she speaks but 118 lines in the entire play of roughly 3340. And yet her position is pivotal in that her directness in the opening scene provides the catalyst for Lear's education from blindness to clarity. Like the Fool, she sees clearly from the start; unlike him, she speaks not in

riddles, but with succinctness. In contrast to Goneril's rhetorical speech in reply to Lear's impossible demand, "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" Cordelia's language is stark. Goneril's counterpunctual answer:

> Sir, I love you more than [words] can wield the matter;
> Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty;
> Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
> No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor;
> As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
> A love that makes breath poor and speech unable:
> Beyond all manner of so much I love you.
> (I.i.55-61)

is a web of hyperbolic tissue expressing the thought that she loves Lear more than words can describe; and then she attempts to describe this love through further words which grow in abstractedness: "Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty;" "No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor;" Set against this frothy speech is Cordelia's silence: "(Aside.) What shall Cordelia speak? / Love, and be silent."

Regan's speech serves as another contrast and aims at Lear's object—his desire for self-aggrandizement. Her speech is less abstract, more concentrated on Lear's wish fulfillment:

> I am made of that self metal as my sister,
> And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
> I find she names my very deed of love;
> Only she comes too short, that I profess
> Myself an enemy to all other joys
> Which the most precious square of sense [possesses]
> And find I am alone felicitate
> In your dear Highness' love.
> (I.i.69-76)

Regan's strategy is the competitive game of one-upmanship in that she professes that she loves Lear not only as much as Goneril, but more—she loves him alone. Thus Regan strives to cut down Goneril as she tries to build up herself. Again comes Cordelia's understated reply:

> Then poor Cordelia!
> And yet not so—since I am sure my love's
> More ponderous than my tongue.
> (I.i.76-78)

Next Lear introduces Cordelia with the preferential,

> —Now, our joy,
> Although our last and least, to whose young love
> The vines of France and milk of Burgandy
> Strive to be interess'd; what can you say to draw
> A third more opulent than your sisters'?
> (I.i.82-86)

In doing so, he is ballasting the competitive game begun with, "Which of you doth say love us most?" Goneril had laid the framework by speaking in superlatives; Regan had attempted to better her with the competitive "Only she comes too short." Now Cordelia is expected to best them all; by now she is to have learned the rules of the game of "least" and "most." But, outrageously to Lear, she refused to play by the rules of the game. "Nothing, my lord." comes her reply.

> *Lear* Nothing?
> *Cord.* Nothing.
> *Lear* Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.
> *Cord.* Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
> According to my bond, no more nor less.
> (I.i.87-93)

Unlike her sisters, Cordelia introduces a new vocabulary of simplicity, which undercuts the previous power struggle. Instead of speaking in superlatives, she offers an alternative to game-playing: the bond, the simple fact of her filial duty. After stopping the game of competitiveness with the abrupt "Nothing," she proceeds to explain her love for her father in terms of tradition—"according to my bond"—and points out the inconsistency of her sisters' professions of absolute love when they, being married, have pledged to love their husbands as lord.

But Lear demands absolute devotion and interprets this logical explanation as cold defiance to his authority.

> But goes thy heart with this?
> Ay, my good lord.
> So young, and so untender?
> So young, my lord, and true.
> (I.i.104-107)

For her honesty, Cordelia is rewarded with disinheritance; for his, Kent is banished and France is allowed to speak briefly in the name of true vision:

> This is most strange,
> That she, whom even but now was your [best] object,
> The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
> The best, the dearest, should in this trice of time
> Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
> So many folds of favor. Sure, her offence
> Must be of such unnatural degree
> That monsters it, or your fore-vouch'd affection
> Fall into taint; which to believe of her,
> Must be a faith that reason without miracle
> Should never plant in me.
> (I.i.214-22)

France's perception—"She is herself a dowry"—is contrasted to Burgundy's more mercenary motives. When Lear agrees to no portion for Cordelia, Burgundy takes the conventional masculine stance of like father, like prospective son-in-law. "I am sorry then," he concludes, "you have so lost a father / That you must lose a husband" (I.i.246-247).

But Cordelia already has assessed his motivation:

> Peace be with Burgundy!
> Since that [respects of fortune] are his love,
> I shall not be his wife.
> (I.i.248-249)

And the insightful France wins:

> Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor,
> Most choice forsaken, and most lov'd despis'd,
> Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,
> Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
> (I.i.250-253)

It is interesting—and somewhat perplexing—to note that Shakespeare did not follow an older version of the play called *Leir*, entered in the Stationers' Register in 1594, and the most probable source for other scenes in *King Lear*. Had he done so here, my application of the masculine code in terms of the father's selection of his future son-in-law might have been easier to see. For in the old *Leir*, as Frank Kermode points

out, the author "begins with the King seeking sons-in-law, being without a male heir, and what he wants from his three daughters is a promise that each will marry the suitor of his choosing. Cordella, as he calls the youngest, evades the issue. Lear had intended to make them equal heirs; but in his anger at Cordella he divides the kingdom equally between Ragan and Gonorill, and abdicates at once (an innovation, since in the traditional story Lear is deposed by rebellion). Shakespeare for whatever good reasons sacrifices this more plausible opening."[6]

Had he retained that original opening, the connection between the authority of the father and the father's selection of his daughter's husband—two corollaries of the masculine code—my task would have been made simpler. However, one of the "good reasons" why he may have chosen not to do so may have been a desire for a more subtle rendition of the theme. In effect, Lear does choose Burgundy over France, and in so doing, shows how deeply his blindness goes. For to France he says:

> Thou hast her, France; let her be thine, for we
> Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
> The face of hers again. (To Cordelia) Therefore be gone,
> Without our grace, our love, our benison.—
> Come, noble Burgundy.
>
> (I.i.261-266)

In leaving with Burgundy, Lear strengthens the masculine bond (both leave by repudiating Cordelia), and undercuts the filial bond of Cordelia. She does not appear again until Act Four, scene four, when, with the doctor, she serves as the healing agent to right the wrong that her sisters have done to her father. As the embodiment of truth, she is needed at the beginning as a catalyst to her father's painful self-education; and, at the end, to restore his faith both in women and in humanity. In the middle of the action she serves no dramatic function, but the memory of her simple directness serves as a foil against the machinations of Goneril and Regan, and the question, "Who is the dutiful daughter?" stands against the backdrop of Lear's anti-feminist ravings of Acts Two, Three, and Four.[7]

The answer apparent to the audience in Act One becomes clear to Lear in Act Four, scene seven, in the reconciliation with Cordelia who he believes is with him in heaven. Only then does he begin to see the truth, saying, "I am a very foolish fond old man," although, ironically, a reversal of this assessment is taking place. But still he thinks in terms of the old law of punishment, while Cordelia embraces the ethic of mercy. "If you have poison for me," he begins,

> I will drink it.
> I know you do not love me, for your sisters
> Have (as I do remember) done me wrong:
> You have some cause, they have not.
> (IV.vii.71-74)

To this, Cordelia answers simply, "No cause, no cause" and again sweeps aside the ethic of an eye for an eye, just as earlier she had stopped the game of competitiveness with "Nothing." Had the play ended here, it would have been more typical of Shakespeare's last period—a romance—in which near tragedy ends in reconciliation. That it does not, marks it as one of Shakespeare's most profound and disturbing tragedies in that reconciliation occurs, followed by the death of the agent of that reconciliation, Cordelia. Lear's last description of Cordelia—

> Her voice was ever soft,
> Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.
> (V.iii.273-274)

is in direct opposition to his enraged response at the paucity of her speech in Act One. When he cries, "And my poor fool is hang'd!" he may be referring to his food now gone, or to Cordelia, now dead, or to both. For both are agents of truth, and of the two, Cordelia is the more direct. For her directness, she is first thought to be defiant. In truth, she is the most dutiful. Edgar in this edition, Albany in others, concludes the play with the unconventional couplet:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey;
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say:
> (V.iii.324-325)

which is stark in its simplicity. The burden of this message might be restated as follows: Speak honestly, not artificially. Through the agency of Cordelia, the ceremonial values of Act One and Five have been totally reversed.

Ted Hughes in *Shakespeare and The Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992) links Cordelia to Egyptian sources and concludes, "When the tragedies are read as rituals of the Mythic Equation, each of the Lucrece figures a Cordelia: afflicted, abused, misunderstood, but inviolate. She is the silence at the source of their simplicity. And each of them embodies Shakespeare's worship—I don't think the word is too strong, in the circumstances—of simplicity. Not 'simplicity', as in 'simple truth miscalled simplicity', but the simplicity closest to the dumb speech of action, the simplicity that Shakespeare always presents as the natural path towards the heart's truth, that 'matter from the heart' which will finally reject words. Simplicity as the breath of the locked-up word of Divine Truth." (278)

But to idealize Cordelia as a romantic heroine in the manner of such nineteenth century sentimental critics as Mrs. Anna Jamison is to reduce her impact as a strong female character. Granville-Barker is more accurate, I think, when he says that "it will be a fatal error to present Cordelia as a meek saint. She has more than a touch of her father in her. She is as proud as he is, and as obstinate, for all her sweetness and her youth. And, being young, she answers uncalculating with pride to his pride even as later she answers with pity to his misery. To miss this likeness between the two is to miss Shakespeare's first important dramatic effect; the mighty old man and the frail child, confronted, and each unyielding."[8]

Toril Moi in *Sexual Textual Politics* (London: Routledge 1985) suggests "But behind the angel lurks the monster: the obverse of the male idealization of women is the male fear of femininity." (58).[9]

Had Cordelia been different, had she passively submitted to the terms of the test which her father provided, there would have been no tragedy and, from this viewpoint, fault may be

found with Cordelia's manner. However, had this been so, Lear would never have learned that love cannot be meted out in quantitative doles which are ceremoniously distributed, and that flowery speeches are not the index to true feeling.

In conclusion to an analysis of Cordelia's character, let us turn for one last time to Granville-Barker as he describes the dramatic necessity behind her depiction: "Shakespeare has provided in this encounter between Cordelia and Lear," he begins, "that prime necessity of drama, clash of character; that sharpest clash, moreover, of like in opposition to like. He has added wonder and beauty by setting these twin spirits in noble and contrasted habitations. Pride unchecked in Lear has grown monstrous and diseased with his years. In her youth it shows unspoiled; it is in flower. But it is the same pride" (304).

The difference, however, is that Lear's pride is Titanic, as is Shakespeare's conception of his character. By comparison, Cordelia's could be likened to Titania's. Or, put more simply, Lear's pride is patriarchal; Cordelia's humanistic.

The apparent defiance of a daughter of her father's authority has ended in tragedy in *Lear*, although, in the process, she serves as an instrument of a finer perception of self. The next section will deal with the authority of the husband, whose control burns brightly, be it with a red or blue flame. In *Othello* the subtle insinuations not only of Iago, but of Brabantio, Desdemona's father, propel Othello into madness and murder. In *Much Ado About Nothing* the passive and conventional Hero is contrasted to the brilliant and assertive Beatrice, while Claudio and Benedick project immature and mature images of manhood. In *Hamlet* the Danish prince, serving as a surrogate husband, sees the whole world infected by the sins of his mother. And in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, a play by Thomas Heywood, the husband Frankford destroys his wife by inverting the masculine code of retribution, killing her with "kindness." If anything, the control of the father is mere child's play when compared to that of her new lord, the husband.

Authority of the Husband

In order to ascertain the traditional role of the wife in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, another glance at "The 2nd Tome on the State of Matrimonie," in *Homilies* (Church of England), (London, 1595), will provide the general attitude—in brief, that the husband should treat the weaker vessel kindly. Or, in words which echo those of St. Paul:

> You husbandes, deale with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour to the wife, as unto the weaker vessell. This precepte doeth particularly pertaine to the husband, for hee ought to be the leader and authour of love, in cherishing and increasing concord, which then shall take place, if he wil use measurablenes and not tyranny, and if he yeelde something to the woman. For the woman is a weake creature, not indued with like strength and constancy of minde, therefore prone to all weak affections and dispositions of minde, more than men bee, and lighter they bee, and more vaine in their fantasy and opinions. These things must be considered of the man, that hee bee not too striffe, so that he ought to winke at some things, and most gently expounde all things, and to forbeare.

This homily incorporates most of the prejudices of the day; beneath the injunction of kindliness is a thinly veiled contempt—woman is alleged to have a weaker mind, to be quick to wrath, and inconstant. The irony of these prejudices will, I think, become clear as we explore the treatment of the husband in several plays of the period. The "Wives' Duty" follows:

> Now as concerning the wives duety. What shall become of her? Shall she abuse the gentleness and humanity of her husband? and at her pleasure, turne all thinges upside downe? No surely. For this is far repugnant against Gods commandement: For thus doth S. Peter preach to them. Yee wives be in subjection to obey your own husbands. To obey, is another thing then to controle or command, which yet they may doe, to their children, and to their family; But as for their husbandes, them must they obey, and cease from commanding, and performe subjection. . . . As S. Paul expresseth it in this fourme of wordes, Let women be subject to their husband as the head of the woman, as Christ is the heade of the Church. Heere you understande, that God hath commanded that ye should acknowledge the authority of the husbande, and referre to him the honour of obedience. And Saint Peter saith in that place before rehearsed that holy matrons did some

> time deck themselves, not with god and obeying their husbands as Sara obeied Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughters ye bee (sayth her) if you follow her example. This sentence is very meet for women to print in their remembrance. Truth it is, that they must feele specially the griefe and paines of their matrimonie, in that they relinquish the libertie of their own rule, and the paine of their travailing, in the bringing uppe of their children. In which offices they be in great perils, and be grieved with great afflictions, which they might be without if they lived out of Matrimonie. But Saint Peter saith, that this is the chief ornament of holy matrons, in that they set their hope and trust in God, that is to say, in that they refused not from marriage for the businesse thereof, for the griefes and periles thereof: but committed all such adventures to God.

From a perusual of this homily addressed alternately to the husband and the wife, it becomes clear that the husband is the master, the wife the submissive servant (although the warning to a few upstarts may suggest that all were not as submissive as hoped for) who, when in doubt or travail, "trusts in God." There seems to be a tone of camaraderie in the first, a tone of impatience and strained pity for the second.[10] The submissive stance of the wife is further reinforced by the advice to wives found in *The Boke of common praier and administration of the Sacramentes, and other rites and ceremonies of the Churche of Englande* (London, 1559), where in the section entitled "The fourme of Solemnization of Matrimonie," which was the official marriage sacrament, and which reads: "Saynt Paule (in the forenamed Epistle to the Ephesians) teacheth you thus: ye womē submyt your selves unto your owne husbands as unto the lorde: for the husbande is the wyves head even as Christ is the head of the Church. And he is also the Saviour of the whole body. Therfore as the churche or congregatiō is subiect unto Christ: so lykewyse let the wyves also be in subiection unto their own husbandes in all thynges."

There were, however, evidently shades of chiaroscuro in the debate about the place of women in the English Renaissance. In *English Domestic Relations 1487-1653* (New York, 1917), Chilton Powell maintains that a more equalitarian attitude towards the husband's authority was emerging, as found in *A Godly Form of Householde Government* (London) by one R. C. (Robert Cleaver?) in 1598 and republished in 1600, 1603,

1612, and 1630, thus attesting to a real interest in the subject. While quoting from the book by R. C., Powell finds the following more moderate position being given expression: "A wise husband, and one that seeketh to live in quiet with his wife, must observe these three rules. Often to admonish; seldom to reproove; and never to smite her. . . . The husband is also to understand, that as God created the woman not of the head, and so equall in authoritie with her husband: So also he created her not of Adams foote, That she should be troden downe and despised, but he took her out of the ribbe, that shee might walke jointly with him, under the conduct and government of her head."[11]

But this was but one glimmer in the darkness of anti-feminist and especially ecclesiastical sentiment against women. Speaking directly of the ecclesiastical position, Powell says:

> It would be difficult to find in the whole of our period a single book of religious or moral nature touching upon woman in which it did not appear that she was, if not wholly weak and sinful, at least far inferior to man. The more lenient writers admitted that there were a few exceptions to this rule; but until Puritan ideals came to have some influence, the average characterization represented woman as at best but a "necessary evil" for the propogation of the race. Bishop Aylmer, in a sermon before Queen Elizabeth, admitted that some women were superior to some men, but claimed that the majority were far otherwise. 'Women are of two sorts, some of them are wiser, better learned, discreeter, and more constant than a *number* of men; but another and a worse sort of them, and the *most part*, are fond, foolish, wanton flibbergibs, tatlers, triflers, wavering, witless, without council, feeble, careless, rash, proud, dainty, nice, tale bearers, evesdroppers, rumour-raisers, evil-tongued, worse-minded, and in every way doltified with the dregs of the devil's dunghill!' (147).

Thus the more progressive attitude towards woman was pitted against a reactionary ecclesiastical one, and the traditional stance appears to be conservative at best. For a closer look at how the powers of imaginative insight play with these stereotyped attitudes, let us turn to Shakespeare's most famous domestic tragedy, *Othello*, in which a father's warning:

> Look to her Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
> She has deceived her father, and may thee.

as well as the machinations of the anti-feminist Iago, trigger a husband's mind to murder. Under the pressure not only of the demi-devil Iago, but of the masculine code, which shares an inherent distrust of woman, an edict might read, "Like father, like son-in-law." When Othello climactically cries, "I will chop her into messes: cuckold me!" he enters not only the world of madness, but as self-appointed divine executioner, he becomes a frenzied proponent of the masculine code. This code, a psychological mind set which often reaches pathological proportions, should be distinguished from the legal code, which all men must ultimately obey. Not all men share this code, but those who do can be characterized as ascribing to something like a gentleman's agreement, where tacit assumptions are held—foremost among them is that the woman in question is not to be trusted, that the authority of the father is not to be questioned, and that, once married, the woman must not appear in any way less than an ideal of wifely devotion, lest the husband be branded that most horrendous of Elizabethan terms, a cuckold. That Desdemona fails, or what is more pertinent, *appears* to fail in projecting this perfect image, is to cause her downfall. In quite literal terms Othello holds the power of life and death over her and eventually snuffs out her breath when furnished with "proof" of her offence. Of all Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* most startingly presents man's attempt to define woman by his own illusions.

The First Act sets the tone for the rest of the play—it opens at night and in confusion. Iago has informed the impulsive Roderigo of his resentment towards Othello for not making him his lieutenant, but he gets to the heart of the matter when he begins manipulating Brabantio's role as father. "Call up her father, / Rouse him: make after him, poison his delight," he tells Roderigo. Once face to face with the old Senator, he says:

> Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
> Is tupping your white ewe. (I.i.88-89)

to which Roderigo rejoins:

> Your daughter, if you have not given her leave,
> I say again, hath made a gross revolt;

Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger
Of here and everywhere. Straight satisfy yourself:
If she be in her chamber or your house,
Let loose on me the justice of the state
For thus deluding you.
(I.i.133-139)

Upon finding her bedchamber empty, the suddenly awakened Brabantio cries:

It is too true an evil; gone she is;
And what's to come of my despised time
Is nought but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her? – O unhappy girl! –
With the Moor, sayst thou? – Who would be a father? –
How didst thou know 'twas she? – O, she deceives me
Past thought!
(I.i.160-166)

Interpreting her mixed marriage as a double affront to parental authority, the now thoroughly awakened Brabantio goes on to warn other fathers:

O treason of the blood!
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
By what you see them act.
(I.i.168-171)

Incensed by the fact that Othello is Black, Brabantio asks in amazement

Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunn'd
The wealthy curled [darlings] of our nation
Would ever have, t' incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou –
(I.ii.66-71)

The only explanation Brabantio can find is that his daughter has been bewitched by the Moor.

Desdemona is brought in to speak for herself, but before she is allowed to do so, two separate images of her are presented. The first is her father's:

A maiden never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
Blush'd at herself; and she, in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, every thing,
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!
It is a judgement main'd and most imperfect,
That will confess perfection so could err
Against all rules of nature, and must be driven
To find out practices of cunning hell
Why this should be. I therefore vouch again
That with some mixtures pow'erful o'er the blood,
Or with some dram (conjur'd to this effect)
He wrought upon her.
(I.iii.94-106)

The second image is that of Othello, who speaks of her fascination upon hearing of his adventures with cannibals and the Anthropophagi, one who

. . . .wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man.
(I.iii.162-163)

The men have difficulty assimilating the conflicting images; on the one side, a demure maiden; on the other, an adventurous and inquisitive mind. When asked by Brabantio, "Where most you owe obedience?" Desdemona's reply is again a double one:

My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty:
To you I am bound for life and education;
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;
And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor, my lord.
(I.iii.180-189)

But Brabantio cannot cope with the duality of her answer and relinquishes her at once:

God be with you! I have done.
Please it your Grace, on to the state affairs.
I had rather to adopt a child than get it.

> Come hither, Moor:
> I here do give thee that with all my heart
> Which but thou hast already, with all my heart
> I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,
> I am glad at soul I have no other child,
> For thy escape would teach me tyranny,
> To hang clogs on them. I have done, my lord.
> (I.iii.189-198)

If man cannot serve two masters, Desdemona implies that neither can woman. But Brabantio interprets her measured defense as betrayal. His final words of warning to Othello—

> Look to her Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
> She has deceived her father, and may thee.
> (I.iii.293-294)

mark a transference of the masculine code from the father to the son-in-law. In this play, only one prejudice runs deeper than that of race—the distrust of women.

The First Act, then, has presented the pattern of the code: an angry father who believes his once dutiful daughter has betrayed him, an adoring husband "or free and open nature" who sees in Desdemona a gentle wife, and beneath the surface, the subterranean promptings of the scurrilous Iago, Othello's alter ego, who instinctively knows that the way to a man's heart is through his daughter or wife. The "white ewe" is cornered from the outset. And in the end she will be betrayed by all three.

In Act Two a dual image of Desdemona is again presented in Cassio's idealized portrait, countered by Iago's cynical one. To Montano's query, "But, good lieutenant, is your general wiv'd?" Cassio answers with the glowing report:

> Most fortunately: he hath achiev'd a maid
> That paragons description and wild fame;
> One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
> And in the essential vesture of creation
> Does tire the [ingener].
> (II.i.60-65)

The epithet, "the divine Desdemona" follows, and then the apostrophe, as she debarks:

Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven,
Before, behind thee and on every hand,
Enwheel thee round!
(II.i.86-88)

Iago's portrait of women is, in contrast, generalized, peevish and insolent. He counters with:

Come on, come on; you are pictures out [a' doors],
Bells in your parlours, wild-cats in your kitchens,
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
Players in your housewifery, and huswives in your beds.
(II.i.109-112)

When Desdemona requests a more specific portrait, asking, ". . . .what praise couldst thou bestow on a deserving woman indeed—one that in the authority of her merit did put on the vouch of very malice itself? (II.i.144-146) Iago's stance is ironical: "O gentle lady, do not put me to 't; /For I am nothing, if not critical" (II.i.118-119.)

"Critical" here means "censorious," an adequate description of Iago's attitude. He might well be speaking from one of the numerous anti-feminist tracts of the day, such as Stephen Gosson's *Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen* (London, 1595), when he sardonically replies:

She that was ever fair and never proud,
Had tongue at will, and yet was never loud,
Never lack'd gold, and yet went never gay,
Fled from her wish and yet said, 'Now I may,';
She that being anger'd, her revenge being nigh,
Bade her wrong stay, and her displeasure fly,
She that in wisdom never was so frail
To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail,
She that could think and ne'er disclose her mind,
See suitors following, and now look behind,
She was a wight if ever such wight were,—
"To do what?" Desdemona interjects, and Iago answers:
To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.
(II.i.148-160)

If Iago's tone is not yet bitter, it is flippant, and as Desdemona remarks, ends with an "O most lame and impotent conclusion!"

After this dual portrait of woman—the idealized and the satirical—comes Othello's version of Desdemona as, after being separated on different ships, they finally are reunited. "O my fair warrior!" Othello at first exclaims, and then, "O my soul's joy!" In contrast to the previous portraits, Othello ascribes the virtues of strength and spirituality to Desdemona. It is as if he sees her as an individual, not as a romanticized or satirical conception. But before too long his assessment is to be changed.

Iago then reveals the specific motivation for his hatred of the Moor. "Now, I do love her too;" he begins,

> Not out of absolute lust (though peradventure
> I stand accountant for as great a sin),
> But partly led to diet my revenge,
> For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
> Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
> Doth (like a poisonous mineral) gnaw my inwards;
> And nothing can or shall content my soul
> Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife;
> Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
> At least into a jealousy so strong
> That judgement cannot cure. (II.i.291-302)

More precisely, Iago aims to use Desdemona as an instrument to wreak revenge on Othello as an unexpected reason for his hatred of the Moor appears: he believes that Othello has betrayed him with his wife. Ironically enough, it is Iago who is initially smitten with the gnawing pangs of the jealous husband. Beyond his desire for the lieutenant post lies the more crippling reason for his malignity—he feels a failure as a man; he believes he is a member of that laughable coterie of men known as cuckolds, a damning epithet for male characters in English Renaissance drama. Hence his disparagement of woman; hence the growing need for revenge.

I have detailed Iago's progress in the play in some length because his attitude of debasing Desdemona is representative of a certain satirical school of thought in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. His attitude reflects the long standing anti-feminist tradition, which would conclude that however noble, wise, and virtuous a woman might appear to be, like Eve, it

was her nature to fall. In this play it is but one point of view, and is set in contrast to the idealized image of woman presented by Cassio and the strong, individualistic one first voiced by Othello, yet it is the dark, debased image which ushers in chaos; it is Iago's increasingly diabolical picture of Desdemona which is to shatter to bits Othello's original conception of her nature and to reduce him to the image of an enraged beast, a wounded giant, a cuckold.

In Act Three, scene three, Iago's insinuations against Cassio and Desdemona begin. As Cassio leaves Desdemona, after imploring her to speak in his behalf to Othello, Iago notes the departure with, "Ha! I like not that." It is the first draught of poison poured into Othello's mind.

After Desdemona rather insistently speaks on Cassio's behalf, Othello firmly but lovingly dismisses her request for the moment, and as she leaves, he concludes the interview with the reflection:

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,
> But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
> Chaos is come again.
>
> (III.iii.90-92)

As with Brabantio's warning, "Look to her Moor," this speech is prophetic. And chaos, be it disruption on the political, cosmic, or domestic sphere, was feared above all else in the Renaissance. Tillyard reminds us that the Elizabethans "were obsessed by the fear of chaos and the fact of mutability; and the obsession was powerful in proportion as their faith in the cosmic order was strong. To us 'chaos' means hardly more than confusion on a large scale; to an Elizabethan it meant the cosmic anarchy before creation and the wholesale dissolution that would result if the pressure of Providence relaxed and allowed the law of nature to cease functioning. Othello's 'chaos is come again', or Ulysses' 'this chaos, when degree is suffocate', cannot be fully felt apart from orthodox theology."[12]

Iago, the agent of the disruption of harmony into chaos, continues his mounting insinuations, next asking Othello, "Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady,/ Know of your

love?" and asks if Cassio be honest. After suffering such asides, Othello finally speaks directly:

> Think, my lord! [By heaven], thou echost me,
> As if there were some monster in thy thought
> Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something.
> I heard thee say even now, thou lik'st not that,
> When Cassio left my wife: what didst not like?
> And when I told thee he was of my counsel
> [In] my whole course of wooing, thou criedst,
> 'Indeed!'
> And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
> As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
> Some horrible conceit: If thou dost love me,
> Show me thy thought.
> (III.iii.106-116)

Iago then begins to drop the damning words of "jealousy" and "cuckold," by sophistically warning Othello:

> O, beware, my lord of jealousy!
> It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock
> The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
> Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
> But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
> Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet [strongly] loves!
> (III.iii.165-170)

Iago's next move is subtle, but progressive:

> I speak not yet of proof.
> Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio,
> Wear your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure.
> I would not have your free and noble nature,
> Out of self-bounty, be abus'd; look to't.
> I know our country disposition well:
> In Venice they do let [God] see the pranks
> They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
> Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.
> (III.iii.196-204)

And then, serpent-like, Iago delivers the "coup," which ties the masculine code together, which unites male generations and leaps blood lines, linking parental authority with the authority of the husband: "She did deceive her father, marrying you."

At this point Othello remains outwardly resolute, in the face of repeated insinuations of Desdemona's erring nature. And yet he does not remain wholly untouched by Iago's poisoning. Once alone, Othello begins to generalize on women in a manner more befitting Iago, marking his first departure from his individual response to Desdemona to the general satirical view of women.

> O curse of marriage,
> That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
> And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,
> And live upon the vapor of a dungeon
> Than keep a corner in the things I love
> For others' uses.
>
> [III.iii.268-272)

Thus in subconsciously absorbing the words of Iago, he begins to think like him. However, because his emotions are still involved, his reasoning becomes unclear. He moves from the acceptance of Iago's reputation, to an analogy which treats Desdemona as a wild hawk, to a confession that he is unschooled in smooth speech, to a consideration of the future, which suddenly stops, as he takes a giant leap to the conclusion—"She's gone. I am abused: and my relief / Must be to loathe her." With this speech the foundations of his world begin to shake. From now on Othello will be seen as an increasingly divided man.

After snatching the handkerchief from Emilia, who has discovered it, Iago describes his method of poisoning Othello's mind with "dangerous conceits" in the soliloquy which follows:

> The Moor already changes with my poison:
> Dangerous conceits are, in their natures poison:
> Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
> But with a little act upon the blood,
> Burn like the mines of sulphur.
>
> (III.iii.325-329)

With the reappearance of Othello in this scene comes the graphic portrayal of these "dangerous conceits" which Iago feeds into Othello's mind until, at the end, his language becomes violent and he denounces Desdemona, while in the

same breath he makes Iago his lieutenant. While struggling to defend Desdemona's name, Othello already begins to see her as debased. "I had been happy," he begins, "if the general camp, / Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body, / So I had nothing known."

Othello continues by warning Iago that what he says about Desdemona had best be true or "Thou hadst been better have been born a dog / Than answer my waked wrath." By pressuring Othello, however, Iago makes Othello channel his "waked wrath" not upon himself, but on Desdemona.

After Othello asks for proof, Iago proceeds to build upon a "dangerous conceit":

> And may, but how? How satisfied, my lord?
> Would you, the [supervisor], grossly gape on –
> Behold her topp'd?
> (III.iii.394-396)

And follows this image with animalistic embroidery:

> What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?
> It is impossible you should see this,
> Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
> As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
> As ignorance made drunk.
> (III.iii.401-405)

When Othello again asks, "Give me a reason she's disloyal?" Iago presents the image of Cassio in his sleep, and reports that

> In sleep I heard him say 'Sweet Desdemona,
> Let us be wary, let us hide our loves';
> And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand;
> Cry 'O sweet creature!' and then kiss me hard,
> As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
> That grew upon my lips; [then] laid his leg
> [Over] my thigh, and [sigh'd], and [kiss'd], and then
> [Cried], 'Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!"
> (III.iii.419-426)

Now Iago sophistically tries to undercut the proof, saying more concrete evidence is needed, which he promptly provides with the handkerchief which Emilia has found. With this "proof" and Iago's assertion that he did see Desdemona

wipe Cassio's beard with it, Othello becomes demonic in his rage:

> Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!
> Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
> To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
> For 'tis of aspics' tongues!
> (III.iii.446-449)

This terrible scene ends with Iago's promise to kill Cassio within three days, and the final exchange rests on the disruption of order and the ushering in of chaos as Othello concludes:

> Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her, damn her!
> Come go with me apart, I will withdraw
> To furnish me with some swift means of death
> For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.
> And Iago replies,
> I am your own for ever.
> (III.iii.475-479)

The irony is, of course, that Othello has made a pact with the devil Iago, yet he projects his own demonic hatred upon the belied Desdemona, calling her "fair devil." It is a common thing, this projection. It is the psychological device of inflicting an evil image which lies within man's own heart and mind onto the nearest object created for him: woman.

Act Four, scene one, continues with an expanded image of the cuckolded husband. After Iago has painted another image of Desdemona, this time in bed with Cassio, and not in a dream:

> Or to be naked, with her friend in bed
> An hour or more, not meaning any harm?

and once more mentions the handkerchief, which Desdemona can no longer find, Othello's language becomes increasingly inarticulate and disjointed:

> Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her when they belie her. Lie with her! [Zounds], That's fulsome! Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief!—To confess, and be hang'd for his labor—first to be

> hang'd, and then to confess. I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips. Is't possible?—Confess? Handkerchief! O devil (falls in a trance.)
>
> (IV.i.36-43)

Here the sexual image of Desdemona with Cassio, coupled with the concrete "proof" of the handkerchief, whose concreteness ushers in other images, now physical—"noses, ears, and lips"—catapult Othello's mind into a kind of frenzy. As he says, "It is not words that shake me thus." It is images. When Iago cautions Othello to "bear your fortune like a man!" Othello now can only think of this term in a perverted sense—"A horned man's a monster and a beast." To imagine oneself a cuckold is the most ignoble state envisioned by the masculine code. In Othello's eyes he can fall no lower. Or in the words of an Elizabethan satirist:

> And be he never so fearful to fray,
> So stark a coward, yet wil he rage
> And draw his knife even straight way;
> Be he never so far in age,
> Call him once cuckolde, and his courage
> Foorth with wil kindle and force him strike,
> Wurse then ye named him heretike.[13]

After the exchange between Iago and Cassio, in which Othello is led to believe that Cassio is speaking of Desdemona, when he actually refers to Bianca, the final "proof" of his wife's infidelity appears assured, and Othello utters a tortured response, filled with remorse at still loving her and the wish or need to destroy her at the same time. When Othello says, "I would have him nine years a-killing. / A fine woman! a fair woman! a sweet woman!" Iago counters with, "Nay, you must forget that." And Othello erupts into a kind of schizophrenic verbal violence:

> Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damn'd tonight; for she shall not live. No, my heart is turn'd to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter creature! she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks.
>
> (IV.i.181-185)

And still Othello speaks of her fondly—"so delicate with a needle," "an admirable musician;" "of so gentle a condition!" and then finally the vertex of his fury: "I will chop her into messes. Cuckold me!" Here the two negatives converge—the violence towards Desdemona and the fear of the loss of masculine caste. "With mine officer!" completes his indignation, his sense of betrayal, and his hurt pride.

When Othello next meets Desdemona he strikes her before the eyes of Lodovico, Brabantio's man, and calls her "devil." The projection of his own inner state onto that of the woman is now complete. In a rage whose rhythms resemble those of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, Othello cries:

> Sir, she can turn, and turn; and yet go on,
> And turn again; and she can weep, sir, weep;
> And she's obedient, as you say, obedient,
> Very obedient.—Proceed you in your tears,—
> Concerning this, sir—O well-painted passion!—
> (IV.i.253-257)

The stunned Lodovico can only say, after observing him strike Desdemona, "I am sorry that I am deceived in him." To the observer, Othello is a madman.

Dramatic irony ensues in the next scene when Emilia places the blame of Othello's change upon "some eternal villain, Some busy and insinuating rogue, / Some cogging, cozening slave to get some office." When Iago replies that "there is no such man; it is impossible," he reveals both himself as the villain and grows in his villainy by further lies. An allusion to the rumor that Othello and Emilia were once lovers—the specific motivation for Iago's baseness—crops up again as Emilia says, "Some such squire he was / That turn'd your wit the seamy side without / And made you to suspect me with the Moor" (IV.ii.145-147).

In Act Five, scene two, Othello articulates his rationale for murder, one which is built into the male code: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men." As he speaks with Desdemona in the bedchamber, he assumes the role of prosecutor, the "Lord above her." "Think on thy sins," he commands. When Desdemona replies, "they are loves I bear to you," he

pronounces judgment: "Ay, and for that thou diest." We recall Egeus' words, "either to die the death, or live a chaste nun," where the father had control over the life and death of his daughter. Here the husband has that power; further, he sees himself as a kind of God, a wielder of divine justice. Like a father confessor, he continues:

> . . . .confess thee freely of thy sin;
> For to deny each article with oath
> Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception
> That I do groan withal. Thou art to die.
> (V.ii.53-56)

Desdemona knows a higher law, however, and appeals to Him: "[Then Lord] have mercy on me!" When Othello says, "I say, amen," Desdemona attempts at the moment of her death to remind Othello of his position not as God, but as man. "And have you mercy too!" she adds.

> I never did
> Offend you in my life; never lov'd Cassio
> But with such general warranty of heaven
> As I might love. I never gave him token.
> (V.ii.58-61)

Against the urgency of her protestations, Othello becomes increasingly turgid. When Desdemona laments the inopportune death of Cassio, who did in fact not die, but later lives to rule Cyprus, Othello cries,

"Out, strumpet! weep'st thou for him to my face?" When she asks to be banished, rather than murdered, that she be allowed to live "But half an hour!" But while I say one prayer!" Othello answers with "Down, strumpet!" "It is too late."

After Othello has strangled her, Desdemona revives briefly to answer Emilia's question of "O, who hath done this deed?" and Desdemona answers without revenge, "Nobody: I myself. Farewell: Commend me to my kind lord: O farewell!" By blaming herself and excusing "her lord," Desdemona may be said to enter the realm of women who are victims of the masculine code. Although innocent—she suffers the abuse of slander and early death, due to the poisoned images of the

masculine mind which had defined her as a devil, whereas, in Emilia's words:

> O, the more angel she,
> And you the blacker devil!
> (V.ii.130-131)

Although overly simplistic, Emilia does touch upon the inversion of justice which has taken place. When she at last confesses that it was she who found the handkerchief and gave it to Iago, Othello's invective against Desdemona finally ceases and he realizes that he himself is in hell.

> Whip me, ye devils,
> From the possession of this heavenly sight!
> Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!
> Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
> O Desdemona! dead, Desdemon! dead!
> (V.ii.277-281)

When Lodovico incredulously asks:

> O thou Othello, that was once so good,
> Fall'n in the practice of a [damned] slave,
> What shall be said to thee?
> (V.ii.291-293)

Othello answers:

> Why, any thing:
> An honorable murderer, if you will;
> For nought I did in hate, but all in honor.
> (V.ii.294-295)

I find it difficult to conceive of "an honorable murderer"—the terms appear mutually exclusive—but obviously one male mind could. For when Othello speaks of "honor," he means his own, and more specifically, his own reputation among men. Although one blames Iago, that "demi-devil," Othello is guilty, too, not only of the murder of his wife, but of the black core of suspicion against women which made this act possible. In his last speech, he attempts his own self-definition:

> Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well:
> Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,

> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base [Indian], threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe. . . .
> (V.ii.345-348)

One reading is to take the definition at face value, pitying the great heart of the noble Othello and blaming the evil Iago. If one accepts this concept of honor, defined as preserving one's reputation, this may appear valid, especially when we consider that Othello was a foreigner who, set against the super-subtle Venetians, was seen as being of a superior moral fiber in the world of men.

If, on the other hand, the construct of male domination and fear of the inherent wickedness in women—in short, the masculine code—is questioned, so is the standard of sympathy. Desdemona, for one could not imagine a woman being false to any man ("I do not think there is any such woman," she tells Emilia in IV.iii). But Othello, admittedly with the egging on of Iago, obviously could.

And that, I think, is both his strength and his weakness. His strength in that he is inherently honest, open, and noble; his weakness in that his honor drives him to murder not only his wife, but his whole moral vision. Thus he is both murderer and victim. Although set apart for being the Moor—either as an African or an Arab or a mixture of the two—he has adopted the tenets of the white man's code, which include an inherent distrust of woman, a proud belief in his right as avenger, an ultimate concern with his own reputation, and a fear of being called cuckold. In accepting Iago's code, he has lost his own.

In this world Desdemona remains ultimately a victim, with only the potentialities of being a viable tragic heroine, although I agree with Ellen Terry who felt "Desdemona was not a 'ninny,' to be played by an 'actress of the dolly type, a pretty young thing with a vapid expression. . . ."[14] Her excitement upon hearing of Othello's adventures marks hers as an inquisitive mind. Her defiance at marrying a man of her choice also suggests a strength of character, but not a wilfulness, for she is quite traditional in articulating her love for her husband and her duty as a daughter. But ultimately she is the victim not so much of Iago, as of the images which he creates.

These images of the evil woman are clear to Brabantio and Iago and Othello. And thus it is these images which lead to her destruction, and she can only appeal to a higher Lord, for the earthly one, once enraged, can only destroy her. Her last words of self reproach and pardoning of Othello serve two purposes: to show her innocence and her submission, which, to modern readers, may border on masochism. According to Carroll Camden, however, in the English Renaissance she is, ironically, "the ideal wife."[15]

Shakespeare's greatest domestic tragedy may be said to have produced a salutary effect upon his audience nevertheless. For according to Marvin Rosenberg in *The Masks of Othello*,

> From the beginning, men wept at *Othello*. A rare 'review' from 1610 tells how, when Shakespeare's company went down to Oxford to play the tragedy, the actors 'drew tears not only by their speech, but also by their action. Indeed Desdemona, though always excellent, moved us especially in her death when, as she lay on her bed, her face itself implored the pity of the audience.'[16]

A word must also be said of the Renaissance controversy over women which, in 1604, the date of this play, was being waged. Among the most notable diatribes against women was *The Schole House of Women*, which is attributed to Edward Gosynhill, and was, as Louis B. Wright notes in his chapter on "The Popular Controversy over Women": "A diatribe against the vanity, talkativeness, extravagance, faithlessness, and general frailty of women from Eve to Jezebel" (468). And, according to one edition of *The Schole House*, that by Edward Vernon Utterson, "Towards the middle and end of the sixteenth century the abuse of females seems to have been a fruitful subject for the muse, and various poems on a similar topic appear to have given employment to the printers of that day."[17]

To descend from Shakespeare to the depths of doggerel, one finds in miniature the Renaissance's darker vision of woman:

> And though they speake with mouth and hart,
> With face they make so good semblance
> That hard it were a man to start
> From their fair glosing countenance;
> Thus with their sugred aperaunce

The simple man, that meane be just,
Deceived are where they moste trust.[18]

To suggest that Shakespeare read such tripe is far-fetched, but he was certainly aware of the anti-Petrarchan convention which he mastered in the "Dark Lady" sonnets. In his plays, however, I believe that he projects an increasingly sympathetic understanding of the dilemma faced by his women characters when confronted with another convention of the masculine code.

Somewhat later the scurrilous attacks on women climaxed in Joseph Swetnam's treatise, which was stridently called *The Araignment of Lewd, idle, froward and unconstant women* (London, 1615). According to Swetnam, even when women were beautiful "shewing pitty, yet their heartes are blacke, swelling with mischiefe, not much unlike other trees, whose outward leaves are faire and greene and yet the body rotton" (Chapter II, 31).

As Wright suggests, "The increasing demand for plays dramatizing domestic problems from everyday life, especially after the beginning of the seventeenth century, is partly the result of the more general realization of the significance and complexity of such ordinary human relations in a rapidly developing urban society. If many a play by Heywood, Dekker, Middleton, and others gave a living demonstration of the problems dealt with abstractly in the treatises, it is nevertheless true that the abstract discussions sharpened the perceptions and increased the concern of the public for problem plays."[19]

Othello is perhaps Shakespeare's greatest domestic tragedy. For a look at how he dealt with domestic comedy, let us turn to a play written in the middle of Shakespeare's career, variously dated at 1599 and 1600, in an effort to determine what the turn of the century held in offering an alternative image of woman.[20]

In *Much Ado About Nothing* we find the archetypal pattern of a father-fiancé-bride triad, in which the woman, Hero, is victimized by false rumors which lead to her public denunciation first by Claudio, who somewhat prematurely assumes the traditional stance of the deceived husband, and then by her

father, followed by her symbolic death arranged by the Frair. In her introduction to the play in the Riverside edition, Anne Barton furnishes valuable background for this archetypal plot.

> In its basic outline, the Hero and Claudio plot is of great age, tracing its ancestry back to the romance literature of ancient Greece. It seems, however, to have acquired an especial popularity during the Renaissance. In constructing his own version of this archetypal story of the lady falsely accused of unchastity, cast off by her lover, and after many vicissitudes restored to him again, Shakespeare probably had at least four non-dramatic variants of the tale somewhere in mind. Ariosto's account, in Canto V of *Orlando Furioso*, of how the Scottish princess Genevra was mistaken for her maid Dalinda, seen keeping a tryst with another man, and so abandoned by her own love Ariodante, would have been available to him in Sir John Harington's translation of 1591. He must also have known Spenser's sombre version, the story of Phedon, Claribell, and the false Philemon in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* (1590), as well as that of Timbreo and Fenicia in Bandello's twenty-second novella (1554), translated into French and adapted generally by Belleforest in his *Histoires Tragiques* of 1574. George Whetstone drew upon both Bandello and Ariosto in his collection The Rock of Regard (1576). There were also several plays, in French, Latin, and Italian, based upon this plot. In 1585, an anonymous Elizabethan dramatist (possibly Anthony Munday) produced a version of the most famous of these, Pasqualigo's *Il Fedele* (1579), under the title *Fedele and Fortunio*. Shakespeare almost certainly knew this play.
>
> Although the essential shape of the story remains the same through all these different tellings, it was in fact subject to variation and also to marked changes in interpretation. Usually, although by no means always, the villain of the piece is the lover's friend: a man treacherously in love with the lady himself who slanders her in order to break off the match. The injured heroine is commonly a fiancée, less usually a wife. In at least one version, that of Spenser, she does actually die. More often, her death is merely symbolic: the prelude to a joyous reunion with her lover, disabused at last of his belief that she was untrue. In a significant number of cases, the lover is blamed quite specifically for the ease with which he gave credence to the false report, and for yielding himself to jealousy without sifting the matter thoroughly. Most versions deal, to some extent, with a conflict between love and friendship in which the most fiery and irrational force of love overthrows not only a former bond of trust but the integrity of a personality.[21]

In this play Hero is the passive, conventional victim who is manipulated and almost destroyed by men. Set in contrast to her is Beatrice, who is removed from the world of masculine domination because she has no living father and is wilfully reluctant to become a bride. Beatrice utters the most forceful

words in the play when, after Hero is disgraced, she urges Benedick to "Kill Claudio."

From the beginning she views the masculine world with a critical eye. When the play opens, Hero's father, Leonato, is inquiring about the military prowess of young Claudio: "I find here that Don Pedro has bestowed much honor on a young Florentine called Claudio," (I.i.10-11.) Beatrice immediately undercuts this man-talk of war. She subsequently inquires about the fate of Benedick and airily comments:

> I pray you, how many hath he killed?
> For indeed, I promised to eat all of his killing.
> (I.i.43-44)

What we find here is not a female cannibal, but rather a scoffer at male pretensions. For her outspokenness, she is repeatedly criticized by the male characters. Leonato reprimands her for her quick tongue: "By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue" (II.i.18-19). And Antonio rejoins with "In faith; she's too curst" (II.i.20).

In contrast, Antonio next advises Hero: "Well, niece, I trust you will be rul'd by your father" (II.i.50-51). Hero is allowed no words, but Beatrice is, and she archly replies:

> Yes, faith, it is my cousin's duty to make
> cur'sy and say 'Father, as it please you.!
> But yet for all that, cousin, let him be a
> handsome fellow, or else make another cur'sy
> and say, 'Father, as it please me.'
> (II.i.52-56)

Dominated by her father, Hero must also suffer the indirect questioning of her would-be husband, Claudio, who is very cautious about entrusting his affection to Hero and must ask advice from others. First he inquires of Benedick: "Didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?" (I.i.160) and "Is she not a modest young lady?" (I.i.165). Then he asks another, the nobleman Don Pedro, for information concerning Hero's family, to which Don Pedro replies that "She's his [Leonato's] only heir" (I.i.294). Having recommendations about the lady's

reputation, as well as her bank account, Claudio can then safely proceed to woo her—with Don Pedro as his surrogate.

Suddenly, however, at the end of Act One a more pernicious plot has been hatched by the bastard brother, Don John. His revengeful scheme is to slander Hero with Borachio's assistance. Thus, in effect, two masculine plots exist: 1. the wooing of Hero for Claudio by Don Pedro, and 2. the villainous scheme of Don John to defame her. Due to the second plot, however, both Claudio and Don Pedro end up slandering her as well.

The light-hearted rumor that Beatrice is in love with Benedick runs parallel to the growing plot to defame Hero. Don Pedro's strategy is to tell of Beatrice's love for Benedick, while the confirmed bachelor overhears the talk and exclaims, "Is 't possible? Sits the wind in that corner?" (II.iii.98). This is male sport of a different shade, less malicious than that of Don John assuredly, but sport nevertheless. Or in Don Pedro's words: "The sport will be, when they hold one an opinion of another's dotage, and no such matter; that's the scene that I would see, which will be merely a dumb-show" (II.iii.215-218).

Hero, too, is involved in this plot to unite Benedick and Beatrice, a further suggestion of her conventional character in that she sees finding a good husband for Beatrice as the most important goal, and readily adopts the plan without question. She joins the men in criticizing Beatrice for her sharp tongue when she tells Ursula:

> But nature never fram'd a woman's heart
> Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.
> Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
> Misprising what they look on, and her wit
> Values itself so highly that to her
> All matter else seems weak. She cannot love,
> Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
> She is so self-endeared.
>
> (III.i.49-55)

However critically she has been described, the lively self-professed spinster stands immediately corrected when she overhears this speech, and she replies to herself: "Stand I

condemn'd for pride and scorn so much? / Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!" (III.i.108-109).

Set against this merry ploy is the developing catastrophe of Don John who flaunts the accusation—"the lady is disloyal"—thus once again threatening the precarious love relationship between Claudio and Hero. Immediately Claudio thinks of "the lady" in terms of his fiancée. "Who, Hero?" he asks. And Don John answers: "Even she—Leonato's Hero, your Hero, every man's Hero" (III.ii.106).

Claudio's question dwindles to one word: "Disloyal?" And again the malicious reply:

> The word is too good to paint out her wickedness. I could say she were worse; think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it. Wonder not till further warrant. Go but with me to-night, you shall see her chamber-window entered, even the night before her wedding-day. If you love her then, to-morrow wed her; but it would better fit your honor to change your mind.
>
> (III.ii.109-116)

Claudio's last question is: "May this be so?" Only Don Pedro withholds judgment, saying, "I will not think it." Of the two, Claudio is the more suspicious and is already capable of vengeance, for he concludes with this report before actually seeing the event:

> If I see any thing to-night why I should not marry her, to-morrow in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her.
>
> (III.ii.123-125)

According to Hardin Craig in his introduction to the play, one should not overly blame Claudio for his defamation of Hero in the church, for "a cruelty of that kind would not be so deeply felt or seen so very unnatural if practiced on a maid unchaste or thought to be unchaste. Seeing is believing, and Claudio thought he had seen."[22]

But here Claudio has not even seen the prepared deception and is ready to shame her before the congregation. Granted, the punishment is preceded by the conditional "if," but the punishment is already planned; his suspicions move to sentencing her. To use the cliché that "seeing is believing" is not to fully comprehend, I think, the deep-seated nature of Clau-

dio's suspicions, which reveal a fundamental distrust of woman, an attitude which cannot be so facilely dismissed.

The climactic scene occurs in Act Four when all the principals are gathered inside the church. Here Hero is subjected to public ridicule and Claudio erupts into a savage denunciation of her. Although innocent, she must face the wrath first of her fiancé, and then of her father. The words addressed to her reveal a baseness of mind which comes from Claudio and not from her: "rotten orange," "wanton," "common stale" reflect the bed-rock of his own suspicious imagination.

Leonato is no better. Like the father of Hermia in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, he would prefer her dead than to live with a tarnished name, and he proceeds to curse her:

> Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes;
> For did I think thou wouldst not quickly die,
> Thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy shames,
> Myself would, on the rearward of reproaches,
> Strike at thy life.
> (IV.i.123-127)

In this terrible scene which borders on tragedy, there stand three characters who are removed from the world of male domination and preoccupation with ego—they are Benedick, who exclaims:

> Sir, sir, be patient.
> For my part, I am so attir'd in wonder,
> I know not what to say.
> (IV.i.144-145)

And Beatrice: "O, on my soul, my cousin is belied!" (IV.i.146). And, finally, the Friar:

> Call me a fool,
> Trust not my reading, nor my observations,
> Which with experimental seal doth warrant
> The tenure of my book; trust not my age,
> My reverence, calling, nor divinity,
> If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
> Under some biting error.
> (IV.i.164-170)

The Friar's plan—to spread the rumor that Hero is dead and thus enclose her memory in sympathy—predates Paulina's action in *The Winter's Tale*, where the noble Hermione is falsely accused by Leontes. Ostensibly *Much Ado About Nothing* is about false rumors, both felicitous, as in the case of Benedick and Beatrice, and villainous, as in the case of Don John. But I believe the play can be seen as much ado about male domination and a defiance of the masculine code. We have already seen what the conventional face of man looks like in the play—it is the paternal visage of Leonato who is willing to join in the chorus of curses against his daughter when she is accused, but not proved, of having been guilty of misconduct. It is the face of the once cautious, quickly suspicious, and finally verbally violent, Claudio, who, in effect, kills her—her reputation or chastity being her very self—in church.

In this play Benedick appears to be a man on the fringe of this coterie of male domination, for he, like the women, is manipulated by Claudio and Don Pedro, and ironically it is he who, when put to the test, proves to be the most manly, in the sense that he is willing to avenge the wrong done to Hero. The test comes in Act Four, scene one, with Beatrice's startling words: "Kill Claudio." Sensing Benedick's hesitation, she continues:

> Is 'a not approv'd in the height a villain, that hath slander'd, scorn'd, dishonor'd my kins-woman? O that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands, and then with public accusation, uncover'd slander, unmitigated rancor,—O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place."
>
> (IV.i.301-307)

This language is among the most forceful of the play, and Beatrice is not the first of Shakespeare's heroines to wish she were a man, in the sense that she could actively assert herself.[23] The image of "eating his heart in the market-place" is startling and echoes her earlier jest that she "promised to eat all of his killing," but here the tone is determined. The speech is also a clever instrument to propel Benedick into action. Beatrice continues, now lamenting the lack of real men:

> O that I were a man for his sake! or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into cur'sies, valor into compliment, and men are only turn'd into tongue, and trim ones too. He is now as valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie, and swears it. I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving.
>
> (IV.i.317-324)

With these words Benedick is at last persuaded. Simultaneously other defenders of Hero's honor suddenly appear on the scene; among them, her father Leonato, who has had a change of heart. Now remorseful, he laments:

> My soul doth tell me Hero is belied,
> And that shall Claudio know;
> So shall the Prince,
> All of them that thus dishonor her.
>
> (V.i.42-44)

Followed by his brother, Antonio:

> —God knows I lov'd my niece,
> And she is dead, slander'd to death by villains,
> That dare as well answer a man indeed
> As I dare take a serpent by the tongue.
> Boys, apes, braggarts, Jacks, milksops!
>
> (V.i.87-91)

But the clearest statement comes from Benedick:

> You are a villain, I jest not;
> I will make it good how you dare,
> With what you dare, and when you dare.
> Do me right, or I will protest your cowardice.
> You have kill'd a sweet lady, and her death
> Shall fall heavy on you.
>
> (V.i.145-150)

Don Pedro and Claudio attempt to brush the challenge aside with a jest about his lack of manliness in combating the remarks of Beatrice, who, we know, is now "reformed." But to no avail. Benedick leaves with the challenge:

> I will leave you now to your gossip-like humor. You break jests as braggarts do their blades, which, God be thank'd, hurt not. . . .Your brother the bastard is fled from Messina. You have, among you, kill'd a sweet and innocent lady.
>
> (V.i.186-191)

Perhaps the most delicious indictment, however, is delivered by Dogberry when he outlines the offenses of Conrade and Borachio. When Don Pedro asks, "Officers, what offense have these men done?" Dogberry answers:

> Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things, and to conclude, they are lying knaves.
>
> (V.i.215-219)

Only when Borachio's plot has been revealed do Don Pedro and Claudio appear contrite. Don Pedro says to Claudio: "Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?" And Claudio replies: "I have drunk poison whiles he utter'd it" (V.i.245-246).

The final maneuver—that of substituting the "cousin" of Hero at the marriage ceremony—now ensures the play of a happy ending. The unmasking of the real Hero suggests the later revealing of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, but here the device seems a contrived convenience, unmotivated by real emotion. Indeed, the character of Hero is seen as puppet-like, popping up at the end like a doll who has been temporarily dismissed. The character of Hero is not complex or challenging enough to elicit deep-seated emotion or concern. The theme or superstructure of male domination is, however, to continue until in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare erupts with a full-scale attack upon the involutional ravings of a Leontes and flows with wonder at the majestic strength of a Hermione.

Benedick and Beatrice promise to love "no more than reason"—but theirs is the real romance, for behind their repartee lies a core of reality of what it means to be a man and a woman, as against the cardboard trappings of the conventional Claudio and Hero. Benedick and Beatrice end on a note of merry bantering as Benedick concedes, "I take thee for pity," and Beatrice answers that she will take him "partly to save [his] life" (V.iv.93;95). But beneath the smiling surface of this play there has been Much Ado About Something: a questioning of the traditional masculine stance towards woman.

The significant question that the play raises is what is the nature of the mature man. As Beatrice must be enlightened to admit her own affection for Benedick, so must he, with her help, be educated as to what true manhood entails. It is as if the strictly traditional role, as evidenced by Claudio, is exposed for its one-dimensional character, while Benedick grows in his understanding of what real manhood is, and finally wins the less than submissive Beatrice. Here, as in that later, even more problematic comedy which treats of a virtuous lady spurned by the man she loves, Shakespeare seems to be implying that all's well that ends well. Or almost.

The question of the authority of the husband is more problematic in *Hamlet*, the next play to be considered, due to the fact that Gertrude's first husband, King Hamlet, is dead and has been replaced by Claudius. Yet, on a closer examination of the play we discover, I think, that in a sense King Hamlet still lives in a surrogate husband role which Prince Hamlet adopts. Indeed, Hamlet interrogates Gertrude with a ruthlessness even beyond the imagination of her first husband (We remember, for instance, that in the closet scene the ghost of old Hamlet stops his son's tirade against Gertrude—so obsessive is Hamlet's attack upon her act of remarriage).

Moreover, loss of faith in the virtue of his mother appears to be the canker which gnaws at Hamlet's inner self. "Frailty, thy name is woman" is, in a sense, a more pivotal speech than "To be or not to be," for not only does Hamlet attempt to avenge his father's death, but to serve as a surrogate husband or substitute conscience to his mother, as a self-appointed righteous persecutor of her weakness. Thus, at once, he is both angry son and, in adopting the role of his father, an actor playing the part of the enraged husband.

The clearest example of this role-playing comes in Act Three, scene four, after Hamlet has returned from finding Claudius at prayer and decides—or rationalizes—against killing him, preferring to wait for a more propitious time when the King is not praying, or, as the audience knows, attempting to. Hamlet soliloquizes:

> Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent:
> When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
> Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At gaming, a-swearing, or about some act
> That has no relish of salvation in 't—
> Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
> And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
> As hell, whereto it goes.
> (III.iii.88-95)

As this passage reveals, Hamlet is quite capable of lewd or violent imaginings and, in the following scene with Gertrude, appears obsessed with the image of "the incestuous pleasure" of his mother and Claudius.

While Polonius hides behind the arras, Hamlet enters his mother's chamber in an especially agitated state, crying, "Mother, mother, mother!" From then on the bitter battle between son and mother, surrogate husband and wife, master and slave, is on. To Gertrude's irritated maternal stance: "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended," Hamlet answers with the swift rejoiner: "Mother, you have my father much offended." The angry rhythms increase:

> Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
> Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

When Gertrude asks, "Have you forgot me?" Hamlet adds a cutting edge to his previous quick display of with:

> No, by the rood, not so:
> You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife;
> And would it were not so, you are my mother.

When Gertrude defensively counters with, "Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak," Hamlet again takes the offensive with increasing mastery:

> Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not boudge;
> You go not till I set you up a glass
> Where you may see the [inmost] part of you.

But before he can proceed, he hears a noise behind the curtain and in contrast to his previous inability to act, kills the

intruder, Polonius. Now he acts without thinking, whereas before he thought without acting, and as if hoping it be true, he asks, "Is it the King?" and Gertrude answers, "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!" But Hamlet feels no chastisement. Instead, he hurls insults back:

> A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,
> As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

Here Hamlet foists his own guilt for the delay in killing the king and for now killing Polonius onto his mother, although there is no indication that she knew of the plot to murder the old Hamlet. Indeed, it is only now that she learns of the murder. "As kill a king!" she cries, astonished.

When Gertrude asks what she has done to merit such abuse, Hamlet responds, sermonizing like an arch Puritan, engulfed in his own self-righteousness, while the corpse of Polonius lies at his feet:

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
> And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows
> As false as dicers' oaths, O, such a deed
> As from the body of contraction plucks
> The very soul, and sweet religion makes
> A rhapsody of words. Heaven's face doth glow
> O'er this solidity and compound mass
> With heated visage, as against the doom;
> Is thought-sick at the act.
> (III.iv.40-51)

When Gertrude asks, "Ay me, what act / That roars so loud, and thunders in the index?" Hamlet answers by showing a contrasting image of the old and new King. The Queen's vile act, worse than the murder which he has just committed or his delay in killing Claudius, is to prefer—or at least to elect—the love of Claudius following the death of old Hamlet. What Hamlet presents is an idealized image of his own father (which may, in part be qualified by the fact that the ghost of old Hamlet leads us to believe that he is in purgatory: "My hour

is almost come / When I to sulph'rous and tormenting flames / Must render up myself." (I.v.3-4) contrasted to a debased one of the present King.

What prompts the continuing invective against Gertrude, however, is something deeper. Her act of remarriage to Claudius has disgusted him in some fundamental way. He now sees—as we note in his interview with Ophelia—all women as potential harlots and appears to be equally fascinated and repelled by the sexual act. The contrasting images of the two Kings and his extended tirade against Gertrude follow:

> Look here upon this picture, and on this,
> The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
> See what a grace was seated on this brow:
> Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
> An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
> A station like the herald Mercury
> New lighted on a [heaven-] kissing hill,
> A combination and a form indeed,
> Where every god did seem to set his seal
> To give assurance of a man.
> This was your husband. Look you now what follows:
> Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear,
> Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
> Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
> And batten on this moor? ha, have you eyes?
> You cannot call it love, for at your age
> The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
> And waits upon the judgment, and what judgment
> Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have,
> Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense
> Is apoplex'd, for madness would not err,
> Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
> But it reserv'd some quantity of choice
> To serve in such a difference. What devil was't
> That hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?
> Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
> Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
> Or but a sickly part of one true sense
> Could not so mope. O shame, where is thy blush?
> Rebellious hell,
> If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
> To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
> And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
> When the compulsive ardure gives the charge,

Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason [panders] will.
(III.iv.54-88)

It is not without irony that Hamlet hurls thirty-four lines of invective against Gertrude for remarrying, cataloguing her blindness of choice, aging, and sensuality, while the dead body of Polonius lies nearby. In the speech Hamlet is not only picturing his father as God-like by referring to Hyperion and Jove, but is himself adopting the role of divine punisher, much as Othello did with Desdemona. In effect, he is positing the traditional masculine stance—that men are God-like creatures, superior in every way to the weaknesses of women.

And the Queen accepts the traditional stance of inferiority:

"O Hamlet, speak no more," she cries,
Thou turn'st my [eyes into my very] soul,
And there I see such black and [grained] spots
As will [not] leave their tinct.

But Hamlet's fury remains unsatisfied. He must proceed in expanding upon the sins of his mother with a kind of puritanical delight:

Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty!

Again she requests him to stop—

O, speak to me no more!
These words, like daggers enter in my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet!

Again he rails:

A murtherer and a villain!
A slave that is not twentith part the [tithe]
Of your precedent lord, a Vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket—

No more!
(III.iv.89-102)

At this point the Ghost enters with the note "(in his nightgown)"—not at all like Hercules, as Hamlet might have expected, and Hamlet's tirade is at last interrupted. Immediately he thinks upon his own sins:

> Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
> That laps'd in time and passion, lets go by
> Th' important acting of your dread command?
> (III.iv.106-108)

Father has returned home and the son expects some sort of punishment for his bad behavior. But little is given. Instead:

> Do not forget! This visitation
> Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
> But, look, amazement on thy mother sits,
> O, step between her and her fighting soul.
> Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works:
> Speak to her, Hamlet.
> (III.iv.110-115)

By "conceit," the ghost presumably means "image" or "picture" or "imagination"—something which Hamlet has been using with a kind of ferocity. It would appear that the ghost is suggesting another, perhaps gentler, kind of "conceit" in order to "step between her and her fighting soul." Although apparently approving of Hamlet's method, he questions the manner in which it has been done. But there is no change in the nature of Hamlet's assaulting images, for, to his mother's question, "What shall I do?" he answers,

> Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:
> Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
> Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
> And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
> Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
> Make you to ravel all this matter out,
> That I essentially am not in madness,
> But mad in craft.
> (III.iv.180-188)

Hamlet's main point is—don't betray me to the King—but he is still obsessed by his mother's remarriage and must punctuate the sensuality of her relationship with such words as

"bloat," "wanton," and "reechy." Why this continued preoccupation with Gertrude's sensuality? It is, I think, because equally as important as, if not more important than, Hamlet's horror at his father's murder is his outrage at his mother's remarriage and, in his eyes at least, her seeming lust. According to Granville-Barker, "the force of Hamlet's reproach that at her age 'The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble, / And waits upon the judgement. . . .' is that, while to intolerant youth (never so intolerant as upon this issue) this should be so with her, it all too patently is not. From this, in fact, springs the tragedy; poor Gertrude's blood was not tame. In this the story of the play is rooted, and much of its meaning will be missed if the point is not from first to last kept clear."[24]

Eleanor Prosser points out the irony of Hamlet's stance towards his mother as well when, in *Hamlet and Revenge*, she observes:

> 'Taint not thy mind,' the Ghost had said. The Closet Scene reveals the full irony of its command. The Ghost had couched an apparent exhortation to virtue entirely in sensual terms, and now Hamlet does the same. The clash between seeming motive and actual method is too striking to be accidental. How does Hamlet try to convince his mother that her behavior has violated rational principles? By picturing it as sensually revolting, not as ethically corrupt. 'Look here, upon this picture, and on this,' he insists: 'Look on these two men as physical objects of sexual desire.' Once having loved a man of Jove's visage, Hyperion's curls, Mars's eyes—a man of god-like form—how could she suffer the embraces of 'a mildew'd ear'? It may be fairly objected, that Hamlet sees his father's physical beauty as a sign of inward grace, but my point here is that he pictures Gertrude's sin entirely in terms of his own nausea at her carnal desire for the man he loathes, of his own disgust that a middle-aged woman should still feel sexual hunger at all (a reaction suggesting that, in Shakespeare's mind, Hamlet is still the very young man of the opening scenes). He charges her with being aesthetically, not spiritually blind. What devil cozened her, dulling her senses of sight, touch, hearing, and smell? How can she tolerate the caresses of such a slimy creature?
>
> In sum, he charges her not with violating the laws of God but with sensual grossness. He does, of course, follow his arraignment with the ethical abstractions noted earlier, but is the arraignment itself phrased in a way that will lead Gertrude to a rational conviction and choice? Would a divine agent use such an appeal?[25]

Hamlet's obsession with the physical details of Gertrude's relationship with Claudius strikes me as significant also. Although, as mentioned earlier, Hamlet may be working with the "conceit," in order to cleanse his mother's soul, he goes about the chore with such gusto that it appears that at times he is projecting his own lewd imaginings onto Gertrude. Professor Prosser footnotes her previous analysis by citing a quotation from L. C. Knights, who is, according to her, "one of the few who has faced squarely the implications of Hamlet's 'fascinated insistence on lust.' He finds that throughout the Closet Scene 'runs the impure streak of the indulgence of an obsessive passion. . . . Hamlet, in short, is fascinated by what he condemns.' "[26]

Hamlet's attitude towards his mother has raised a critical problem which has baffled others, most notable among them, T. S. Eliot. In his famous essay on "Hamlet and His Problems" in *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot criticizes the play on the grounds that it lacks an "objective correlative." Citing another critic, J. M. Robertson, he maintains that Robertson is "undoubtedly correct in concluding that the essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother:" and that, in Robertson's words, "'[Hamlet's] tone is that of one who has suffered tortures on the score of his mother's degradation. . . . The guilt of a mother is an almost intolerable motive for drama, but it had to be maintained and emphasized to supply a psychological solution, or rather a hint of one.' "[27]

But Eliot suggests that this is not the whole story, and then goes on to present his famous definition of the "objective correlative."

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is completely evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence; you will find that the state of mind of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep has been communicated to you by a skillful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions; the words of Macbeth on hearing of his wife's death strike us as if, given the sequence of events,

> these words were automatically released by the last event in the series. The artistic 'inevitability' lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear. And the supposed identity of Hamlet with his author is genuine to this point: that Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective correlative to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem. Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing that Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him. And it must be noticed that the very nature of the données of the problem precludes objective equivalence. To have heightened the criminality of Gertrude would have been to provide the formula for a totally different emotion in Hamlet; it is just *because* her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing (100-101).

Although this, again, is not the whole story, I believe Eliot's critical dilemma may be resolved in part by considering the strength of the anti-feminist tradition and the "excess of emotion" which almost categorically characterizes the male when his trust in women, or, more precisely, a significant woman, such as his mother, wife, or daughter, is shattered. While I agree with Eliot that Hamlet's reaction is excessive, both in response to his mother's remarriage and to his projection of his disillusionment onto the world around him, it is not without precedent. Othello does the same; as do Lear, and Leontes and Ferdinand. The point is that the emotion stimulated in regard to women, be it rage, jealousy, disillusionment, whatever, is almost predictably excessive.

It is precisely the fact that this emotion is so terrible, so exaggerated, that one finds difficulty understanding it. But in the light of other plays of the period, Hamlet's response is not the exception, but the norm. When one understands that the whole male construct appears to revolve around the control of women, and when this code is disrupted by defiance, open or covert, or sin, as Hamlet conceives his mother's relationship with Claudius to be, the entire moral construct falls and plunges the male character into a kind of frenzy.

T. S. Eliot concludes that "we must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle; under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know. We need a great many facts in his biography; and we should like to know whether, and when, and after or at the same time as what personal experience, he read Montaigne, II. xii, *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*. We should have, finally, to know something which is by hypothesis unknowable, for we assume it to be an experience which, in the manner indicated, exceeded the facts. We should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself" (102-103).

But this is to underestimate Shakespeare's profound understanding of Hamlet's dilemma. Beginning with Hamlet's acid disillusionment with his mother, his precarious balance between sanity and insanity serves as an exemplum for later tragic heroes of Lear, Othello, and Leontes. All are initially unmoored by their trust in a particular woman and all approach or enter into a raving world of madness. Contrary to Eliot, it is my opinion that Shakespeare knew precisely what he was doing in presenting the excessive outbursts which characterize the male mind when the masculine code of control over women has been threatened; he did not need Montaigne's assistance.

And of what is Gertrude guilty to produce such an aggrieved response in Hamlet? Of marrying her first husband's brother, certainly not of killing her first husband; nor is there any clear indication that the relationship between Gertrude and Claudius preceded the murder. In the Tudor period the most famous case of such an "incestuous marriage" took place when, after over two decades of marriage, King Henry VIII's conscience suddenly became unusually sensitive to the fact that he had married the wife of his dead brother, but this was more probably a rationale for his wish to marry Anne Boleyn, who was soon pregnant with his child. Hamlet's conscience is also unusually sensitive to the infractions of his mother, when King Claudius is the real villain. Hamlet's out-

rage becomes understandable only when one considers the weight of anti-feminist prejudice against women; whatever infractions a woman did, although usually less serious than those of men, were weighed as vastly more horrendous. Although by the end, Gertrude is guilt-stricken, the reason for her guilt is never quite clear. This, indeed, is one of the real mysteries of the play.

One thing is certain—Hamlet's treatment of Gertrude in this scene shows an almost classical pattern in English Renaissance Drama of condemning woman more fiercely than man. Moreover, Hamlet is both outraged son and, in adopting the role or authority of his dead father, indignant surrogate husband. For his treatment of one who might have been his wife or his fiancée, let us now consider Ophelia, an innocent girl who might win a placard as the most dutiful daughter in Shakespeare's canon.

Bound by the dictates of her father and watched by her brother Laertes, she stands as one of the pitiful victims of the masculine code. Of what is she guilty? Of telling one innocuous lie, that her father is at home, in her exchange with Hamlet, as Polonius and Claudius stand behind the arras overhearing the arranged conversation, using Ophelia as a ploy.

Holding a prayer book, Ophelia has brought Hamlet gifts which he once gave to her as tokens of his affection. Then Hamlet's cruel game begins, "are you honest? . . . Are you fair?" he asks, playing on the Elizabethan meaning of "honest" which also meant "chaste." When Ophelia asks the meaning of such questions, "Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?" Hamlet answers:

Ham. Ay, truly; for the beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

Oph. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Ham. You should not have believ'd me, for virtue cannot so [inoculate] our old stock but we shall relish of it: I lov'd you not.

Oph. I was the more deceiv'd.

Ham. Get thee [to] a nunn'ry, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me

of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my back than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunn'ry. Where's your father?

Oph. At home, my lord.

Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in 's own house. Farewell.

Oph. O, help him, you sweet heavens!

Ham. If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunn'ry, farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunn'ry, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

Oph. Heavenly powers, restore him!

Ham. I have heard of your paintings, well enough. God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, and you [lisp,] and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on 't, it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no moe marriage. Those that are married already [all but one] shall live, the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunn'ry, go.

(III.i.1-2-149)

While beginning with a playful denigration of his own sex ("We are arrant knaves, all"), Hamlet soon lapses into the more familiar recitative of an anti-feminist or misogynist. It is as if Hamlet, blinded to the person before him, apostrophizes women in general, whom, after his mother's remarriage, he sees as debased. Ophelia's forced lie sets off the flood of contemptuous images against the frailties of women, and his reiteration of "nunn'ry" has an ironic ring, as it also meant "brothel."

The last outburst, which tells of paintings, dancing, lisping, and other ills outlined in an anti-feminist catalogue, have no relevance to the real Ophelia, but, as Granville-Barker, notes in his chapter on *Hamlet* in *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, "Ophelia in the guise of his mother the harlot; Ophelia made symbol and scapegoat of her kind" (p. 79). Hamlet is enraged first with his mother, and then with what he considers to be the general nature of woman, which he now transfers onto the individual Ophelia. It is as if she weren't there in a way; not Ophelia,

only Woman. Granville-Barker, however, offers another explanation, which may have merit, when he says of this scene:

> One can detect in Hamlet here a slight psychological incongruity, for which the old story of the old play may be responsible, the episode in it which gives us the 'fair woman' sent to seduce him and his secret from him. There is nothing in the least wanton about Ophelia; yet (well before, in his mad rage, his obsession about his mother's wantonness shows) his talk to her of beauty transforming honesty to a bawd sounds a little as if he suspected her of such designs on him. There is effective irony, of course, in his speaking thus to an innocent girl, who has been 'loosed' to him with a prayer book in her hand; and the subtler thought—that it is even viler to turn innocence and piety to such uses—is already implicit in Polonius' preparatory
>
> > We are oft to blame in this. . . .
> > that with devotion's visage
> > And pious action we do sugar o'er
> > The devil himself.
>
> Yet it looks as if the genesis of Hamlet's attitude lay in a recollection of the cruder theme. This would fit in, what is more, with the surprisingly indecent treatment of her in the play-scene—since nothing she has said or done gives excuse for that. But again, there is more refined cruelty and more disequilibrium of mind in saying such things to an innocent girl. Have we here then, perhaps a visible part of the process of Shakespeare's transference of the story from the physical to the psychological plane? (214)

Perhaps. But Hamlet's verbal violence is not unique. Rather, it appears in every male character who adopts the role of defender of the masculine code, and erupts in its most demented form in the ravings of Leontes in Shakespeare's late romance.

Granville-Barker's explanation—that the scene derives from an earlier source, in which the part played by Ophelia was that of a female intelligencer, and thus a probable target for such abuse—is interesting, but it seems to me unlikely that Shakespeare would confuse the two women's roles to such an extent. A more probable explanation, I think, is my earlier suggestion —which Granville-Barker also points out—that Hamlet no longer sees Ophelia as she is, but as the representative of frail womanhood, a scapegoat who is manipulated by all the men in the play. And, finally, and most

simply, Hamlet apparently knows that she is lying. What he does not know, however, is that her father forced her to do so.

Ophelia's touching idealism is shown when, at the end of this scene, after Hamlet's tirade, she speaks of the former Hamlet:

> O, what a noble mind is here o'er-thrown!
> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
> Th' expectation and róse of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> Th' observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
> And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
> That suck'd the honey of his [music] vows,
> Now see [that] noble and most sovereign reason,
> Like sweet bells jangled out of time, and harsh;
> That unmatch'd form and stature of blown youth
> Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me,
> T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!
> (III.i.150-161)

It is ironic that she who can see the aberration of Hamlet's present state of mind will soon become mad herself because of his treatment of her and the murder of her father. Thus is Ophelia destroyed by the man she might have married, and thus by being staged as a decoy by her father and the King, is she a pawn in the hands of all men. In obeying her father and believing Hamlet's earlier professions of love, she is caught in a psychological double-bind. The most dutiful of daughters is used for political gain; the most chaste of maidens is labelled a potential whore. While critics of Ophelia may interpret her passivity as weakness, they forget, I think, that here, like Desdemona, is no "ninny," but rather a sensitive, intelligent girl, whose capitulation to the ubiquitous male forces about her lead her, because of her conventionality, to the only end possible under such terrible circumstances: madness and suicide.

Harley Granville-Barker thus concludes his assessment of her character: "She vanishes with the rest when the crisis comes, and we do not see her again. For the mindless wraith that we see is no longer Ophelia. The father she loved and trusted killed by the man she loved; it is the final and fatal wrench. Her madness tragically outmatches his whose work it is" (269).

Even Hamlet's protestations of love for Ophelia at her grave, while no doubt genuine, have a touch of bravado about them, and ring with a competitive spirit which dares to outdo its competitor, Laertes. Hamlet speaks little of Ophelia; much about himself when he reveals himself and shouts:

> I lov'd Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?
>
> 'Swounds, show me what thou't do.
> Woo't weep? woo't fight? woo't fast? woo't tear thyself?
> Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
> I'll do't. Dost [thou] come here to whine?
> To outface me with leaping in her grave?
> Be buried quick with her, and so will I.
> And, if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
> Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
> Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
> Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, and thou'lt mouth,
> I'll rant as well as thou.
>
> (V.i.269-271; 274-283)

So ends the fragmentary glimpse of Ophelia. When last seen alive, a madwoman bestowing flowers of remembrance; now, a suicide. Such was her role in life, a victim of the male attitude towards women, a pawn in a political chess game.

And as for Gertrude, Hamlet's last words are the perfunctory "wretched queen, adieu!" Berated by her son who assumes the role of surrogate husband in castigating her for her sin of remarriage, she finally drinks from the poisoned cup. This one act of petty defiance to Claudius leads to her death. The women in *Hamlet* have little choice except to be dutiful or defiant. But either position is cancelled out, for neither carries with it any truly viable choice in the world of men; the women are defined by men, verbally assaulted by men, and destroyed by men. For practical purposes, in the play the two contrasting characters of the innocent Ophelia and the worldly Gertrude share one common fault: both are born female.

The passive woman destroyed by the masculine code of male domination is most strikingly portrayed in an inversion of the

male role in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, believed to have been first performed in 1603. Here Anne Frankford, the pilloried wife of John Frankford, is almost perfunctorily seduced by Frankford's trusted friend Wendoll, and Anne's sentence is banishment from her husband, which results in her death by self-mortification and self-induced starvation, while Wendoll is allowed to escape unscathed to France. The play represents a mixture of the Elizabethan domestic tragedy and an inverted Patient Griselda theme, for here the wife is reluctantly unfaithful and the husband is coolly forgiving. But by inverting his revengeful motives, Frankford nevertheless vows that he will "kill her with kindness." And instead of the jealous ravings of an Othello, in Frankford we find the cold manipulator of his passive wife.

Although Anne is first presented as an ideal wife and a fit match for Frankford—

> First, her birth
> Is noble, and her education such
> As might become the daughter of a prince,

says Charles, and Frankford agrees,

> A perfect wife already, meek and patient!

she nevertheless falls victim to Wendoll's wiles within the space of a single interview, or approximately seventy lines, in Act Two, scene three. In her capitulation, she is made to sound like a mindless idiot. After Wendoll's entreaties of love both to her and to her husband's name, she whimpers:

> What shall I say?
> My soul is wan'ring, hath lost her way.
> Oh, Master Wendoll! Oh!

When Wendoll answers:

> Sigh not, sweet saint:
> For every sigh you breathe draws from my heart
> A drop of blood.

Anne relinquishes all responsibility with

I ne'er offended yet:
My fault, I fear, will in my brow be writ.
Women that fall, not quite bereft of grace,
Have their offences noted in their face.
I blush and am asham'd. Oh, Master Wendoll,
Pray God I be not born to curse your tongue,
That hath enchanted me! This maze I am in
I fear will prove the labyrinth of sin.[28]
(II.iii.154-161)

Some kind of mitigating sympathy may be said to be given her when the eaves dropping servant, Nicholas, says:

It is that Satan hath corrupted her;
For she was fair and chaste.

But this is cancelled out by the concluding rhyme:

I'll have an eye
In all their gestures. Thus I think of them:
If they proceed as they have done before,
Wendoll's a knave, my mistress is a _____.
(II.iii.182-185).

Peter Ure explains the sudden capitulation of Anne as consistent with the Elizabethan attitude towards woman when he says: "The sudden breakdown of Mistress Frankford's resistance to Wendoll in II.iii (152-4) is condemned as, by modern standards, psychologically implausible—the result, according to Clark, of the constriction of the main plot by the underplot—or hardily justified as a fragment of obsolete psychology having to do with old beliefs about man's dominance of a single passion and the debility of virtuous women placed in Eve's position." But, he continues, "one must remember the necessary time-scheme and architectonic of the whole play. . . . The surrender of Mistress Frankford herself in II.iii. which is the ground of these scenes (in which the moral theme becomes incarnate in the suffering husband), is, rightly, not felt as they are: there we are merely presented with the act itself, the datum only of the theorem of tragic consequences which are the substance of drama as distinct from morality. Consequently, our reaction there is one of regret, tinged with moral

reproof, and an acceptance that this is a part of the unfolding of the story."[29]

In other words, Ure is critical of the modern predilection, mine included, of foisting a generalized Elizabethan conception of woman onto the character of Anne and attaching importance to a scene which ultimately he sees only as a donnée, so that Frankford can then provide the real moral theme of the play, namely to become the suffering husband incarnate. Before I suggest that Ure may be applying what he considers to be the same "dry" standards to the male protagonist, Frankford, let us examine what other critics have said about the presentation of Anne in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. According to Hardin Craig,

> She is a good woman until she is beset with temptation. One would call her weak if Renaissance philosophy did not oblige her to carry her sex with her. Women were frail and susceptible by nature. Hence a world of chaperonage and the doctrine of the removal of the occasion. To the Renaissance natural goodness was not regarded as a sufficient safeguard for women against the temptations of the flesh; for they were strong in passion, weak in reason. To be tempted was to fall. Vives is strict, not only in his injunctions that women be brought up to be modest, chaste, mild and obedient, but also, no matter how good they are, that they must not go out in the street any more than necessary, and when they do, they must keep their eyes straight in front of them that they may not be caught by the lures the devil has prepared for their eyes. They must never be in the company of men without some member of their families or some sage matrons by to guard them from temptation and occasion. Even Montaigne, the liberal, repeats Plato's statement that women are like dissolute boys.[30]

After presenting this generalized image or attitude towards woman, Craig then directs his comments specifically to this play:

> Wendoll's attack is one calculated to soften a soft nature (II.ii); he reveals his love, throws himself on Anne's mercy, appeals to her pity. She must choose between duty, which means cruelty to a submissive and helpless suitor, and pity. She responds to the condition her lover is in (perhaps because she knows what submission and helplessness are?) and for his danger. She is weak in judgment, strong in pity; she is a woman. There is plainly a preconceived notion of what a woman would do in the circumstances. Anne's yielding to Wendoll is the psychological convention of the frail woman put to the test. Very

> important, for Jacobean drama, was this staging of psychological doctrines. . . . Her confusion is the shattering of such reasonable will as Elizabethan psychology allowed her. From the first she is exhibited as a yielding, modest, obedient woman. We, rather than the Elizabethans, would condemn her for lacking a will of her own; to them she was the most favoured ideal (pp. 132-133).

Although Ure might label Craig's remarks as "dry morsels," I happen to find them illuminating and sound. For it appears to me that Anne's capitulation is not only a donnée in this specific play, but in Elizabethan thought. That Heywood doesn't develop it further only suggests that it is an accepted convention. Ure's sympathies obviously lie with Frankford, "the suffering husband." We shall see how much he suffers, in a moment.

The first extended example of suffering appears in Act Four, scene five, when Frankford has discovered Wendoll and Anne together, and she appeals to her husband with what we might consider masochistic servility, coupled with a curious vanity for her appearance; again, no doubt, another Elizabethan assumption about women:

> I would I had no tongue, no ears, no eyes,
> No apprehension, no capacity.
> When do you spurn me like a dog? When tread me
> Under feet? When drag me by the hair?
> Though I deserve a thousand, thousand fold,
> More than you can inflict—yet, once my husband,
> For womanhood, to which I am a shame,
> Though once an ornament—even for His sake,
> That hath redeem'd our souls, mark not my face,
> Nor hack me with your sword; but let me go
> Perfect and undeformed to my tomb!
> I am not worthy that I should prevail
> In the least suit; no, not to speak to you,
> Nor look on you, nor to be in your presence;
> Yet, as an abject, this one suit I crave:—
> This granted, I am ready for my grave.
> (IV.v.54-69)

After this, Frankford adopts the role of divine punisher more than, I think, suffering husband. With each artful interrogation, he manipulates her response:

Was it for want
Thou play'dst the strumpet?
Wast thou not suppli'd
With every pleasure, fashion, and new toy,—
Nay, even beyond my calling?

The obvious answer is, of course, "yes." Frankford then asks,

In thine eyes seem'd he a properer man?

The answer, "no." Finally—for the "coup"—Frankford brings in the children and castigates Anne before them, and then demands that they be removed:

Away with them; lest, as her spotted body
Hath stain'd their names with stripe of bastardy,
So her adulterous breath may blast their spirits
With her infectious thoughts! Away with them!

Now Anne's posture becomes grotesque:

't is welcome, be it death. Oh me, base strumpet,
That, having such a husband, such sweet children,
Must enjoy neither! Oh, to redeem mine honour.
I'd have this hand cut off, these my breasts sear'd;
Be rack'd, strappado'd, put to any torment:
Nay, to whip but this scandal out, I'd hazard
The rich and dear redemption of my soul!
He cannot be so base as to forgive me,
Nor I so shameless to accept his pardon.
(IV.v.96-104)

Modern readers would react to this as a case of extreme mortification. But Craig again throws light on the Elizabethan attitude and how it relates to the masculine code. "Her repentance is genuine and pitiful (IV.v). It has in it another element; it is formal. Her grief is for her offense to her husband *qua* husband, rather than for the personal sorrow she has caused him. She sorrows for the breach of her vow. The matrimonial sacrament in the Elizabethan ethical system was something fixed by God in His Church and supported by the law as a part of God's plan for governing the universe. Frankford is an authorized justicer. This gives her a new sense of

her famous words (IV.v.103) 'He cannot be so base as to forgive me.' She hates her sin and in the same motion hates Wendoll. Her death is her expiation (133-134).

The role of Frankford as "authorized justicer" puts him in a different light as well. "To us his kindness possibly seems a refinement of cruelty, but in the sense of the play he is the judge, the institution, in quite natural human form."

And what of the villain, Wendoll, who instigates the action?

> Wendoll too is repentant, but in the modern view he gets off very lightly (he leaves to be an adventurer in some foreign country). In the author's mind justice was apparently satisfied when Anne died and did not require the imposition of punishments on Wendoll. In Elizabethan eyes her act was worse than his, and it does not matter that he was the base instrument of her fall or that her fall was inevitable to the frail nature of womanhood. She is the one who has something important to guard, the sanctity and inviolability of the family, the honour and good name of her lord and master. The depth of her humiliation illustrates the power of Elizabethan mores to reinforce the torments of the individual conscience (134).

Thus, according to Craig, Frankford's sentence:

> I'll not martyr thee,
> Nor mark thee for a strumpet; but with usage
> Of more humility torment thy soul,
> And kill thee even with kindness.

is to be seen in the light of his role as divine punisher, much as Othello and Hamlet saw their role. But to entirely accept this position, founded as it is on a theological basis, is to overlook, I think, the dramatic tensions inherent in this position. Although Hamlet and Othello and Master Frankford believed themselves to be right in acting as representatives of the divine order and punishing weak women for their real or imagined fall, it seems to me that if we accept them at face value in this role, we then see them primarily as a kind of stock figure. I contend that in all of these cases, but most notably in Shakespeare, the character is to be viewed with a kind of double vision, although he may be conventionally "right," according to Elizabethan mores, in human or humane terms he seems to be woefully lacking. That Heywood ends not only with Anne's death—and a last minute remarriage, now that she is cleansed

through repentance—but also with Frankford's remorse is, I think, significant. Having not punished her in the conventional manner, but by "kindness" in banishing her, he feels, quite rightly, that he has killed her. (Actually, however, he uses both methods: humiliation and cold "kindness.")

When his brother-in-law reminds him,

> Brother, had you with threats and usage bad
> Punish'd her sin, the grief of her offence
> Had not with such true sorrow touch'd her heart.

Frankford agrees:

> I see it had not; therefore, on her grave
> Will I bestow this funeral epitaph,
> Which on her marble tomb shall be engrav'd.
> In golden letters shall these word be fill'd;
> Here lies she whom her husband's kindness kill'd.
> (V.v.93-100)

This last minute repentance on Frankford's part appears contrived, however, when we recall his earlier words:

> I'll not martyr thee,
> Nor mark thee for a strumpet; but with usage
> Of more humility torment thy soul,
> And kill thee even with kindness.

There are at least two ways to interpret the concluding lines of this statement—either as a figurative expression of intent to kill, or as a literal statement. The right way can be found, I think, if one can support the theory that he knows how to destroy his wife.

His handling of her in the interrogation scene by first asking if she were not provided for, was the other man properer, and then by presenting and later taking away her children, reveals him as a master manipulator of her emotions. Thus I believe that while Frankford may appear to be genuinely remorseful at the end, his treatment of her prior to the deathbed reunion shows that he knew how to handle his wife in such a way as to wound her most deeply. Thus, in a curious way, Frankford outdoes Hamlet and Othello in their interrogation of Gertrude and Desdemona, for by inverting the rail-

ing ministerial role, Frankford ultimately kills his wife with the psychological torture of guilt.

But compared with Shakespeare's characters, Frankford appears to suffer least. To suggest, as Peter Ure does, that "the moral theme becomes incarnate in the suffering husband" is to overlook the fact that Frankford's actions border on sadism, not only to us, but to his reformed-rake brother-in-law, Francis. The point, it seems to me, is that while Anne erred, so did Frankford—in carrying his sentence too far or not far enough—whichever way you wish to look at it. Only at the end—at Anne's deathbed—does Frankford even appear to suffer. Before that, he seems to relish his manipulation of Anne.

Of all the women characters treated thus far, Anne alone serves as a kind of stereotype for the Elizabethan woman, who was expected to be submissive and weak and—when the expectation was fulfilled—was punished doubly for her offence. In internalizing her guilt to a grotesque degree, she fulfills the anti-feminist stereotype of the guilt-ridden sex, asking that she be mutilated, yet at the same time, in a wry disclosure of vanity, requesting that her face be not marred.

The question arises as to the author's attitude towards his subjects. Heywood's title, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, suggests a certain sympathy for Anne as victim. But the structure of the play, with its opposition of the virtuous Susan to the fallen Anne, tends to deflect this sympathy. And Anne seems to be presented less a sympathetic character than a sentimental one; she represents the woman who must die in order to expiate her sin. That she is presented initially in glowing terms only serves to underline the moral which she herself speaks:

> Oh, women, women, you that yet have kept
> Your holy matrimonial vow unstain'd,
> Make me your instance; when you tread awry,
> Your sins, like mine, will on your conscience lie.
> (IV.v.105-108)

Thus Heywood's presentation of Anne appears to be more conventional than Shakespeare's presentation of his women characters. For, in dramatic terms, in this play the ultimate

guilt lies with the wife, not the husband, although he killed her. Shakespeare's sympathies, it seems to me, are more complex.

In concluding an examination of the authority of the husband, or the surrogate husband, in *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, by virtue of the masculine code, we find two women slandered, one murdered, the other restored; one woman ridiculed for her individualistic stance and criticized for her wit; one innocent girl destroyed by brutal ranting and the murder of her father; another ruled by her husband and railed at by her son; and finally one who is presented as a classic case of the once good, now fallen, wife, who is destroyed not by her husband's cruelty, but by his "kindness."

Hamlet says as he goes to interrogate his mother—"I will speak daggers to her, but use none." After the invective displayed by the male protagonists, it appears that "kindness"—which also meant "natural" in Elizabethan English—is, in this context at least, a synonym for cruelty. And speaking daggers can be as deadly as using them.

Although most of the homily "On Matrimonie" accords with Hamlet's judgment that "Frailty, thy name is woman," one late passage might have been overlooked by husbands. It is this:

> And therefore considering these her frailties, she is to be the rather spared. By this means, thou shalt have her heart in thy power and will. For honest natures will sooner be retained to doe their duty, rather by gentle wordes, then by stripes. But he which will doe all things with extremitie and severitie, and doth use rigor in words and stripes what will that availe in the conclusion: Verily nothing: but that he thereby setteth forward the Devil's worke, he banisheth away concord, charitie, and sweet amytye, and bringeth in dissention and hatred. . . .
>
> ("2nd Tome on the State of Matrimonie")

The curious anomaly is, however, that most of the women characters in Shakespeare do not hate, in spite of their mistreatment, but love. But, then, one knows how "weak" women are.

Notes

1 The masculine code, a psychological mind set based on male bonding which often reaches pathological proportions, should, however, be distinguished from the legal code, which all men must ultimately adhere to. Further, it should be emphasized that not all men share the attitudes of the masculine code; Lodovico in *Othello*, for example, stands as a norm by which Othello's aberration may be judged, as does France in *King Lear*.

2 Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, "Paternity in Shakespeare," Annual Shakespeare Lecture in *The Proceedings of the British Academy* (London: Offices of the Society, 1938), 12.

3 John Stockwood, *A Bartholomew Fairing for Parentes* (London, 1589), 29. Bodleian MS. Demyer 21.

4 Quiller-Couch, 2.

5 Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, I. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 279.

6 Frank Kermode, "Introduction to *King Lear*," in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 1250. In *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, ed. John S. Farmer (1605; facsimile rpt. n. p., The Tudor Facsimile Texts, 1910), a reference is found to Leir's choice of a husband for Cordella:

> Then at the vantage will I take Cordella
> Even as she doth protest she loves me best,
> Ile say, Then, daughter, graunt me one request,
> To shew thou louest me as thy sisters doe,
> Accepte a husband, whom my selfe will woo.
> This sayd, she cannot well deny my sute,
> Although (poore soule) her sences will be mute:
> Then will I tryumph in my policy,
> And match her with a King of Brittany.

7 For example, Lear rails after his mistreatment at the hands of Regan and Goneril:

> Behold yond simp'ring dame,
> Whose face between her forks presages snow;
> That minces virtue, and does shake the head
> To hear of pleasure's name—

> The fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to 't
> With a more riotous appetite.
> Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
> Though women all above:
> But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
> Beneath is all the fiends': there's hell, there's darkness,
> There is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding,
> Stench, consumption. Fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!
> (IV.vi.118-129)

Lear's tirade against his two devious daughters echoes more of a sexual disgust of women than a simple generation gap which the example of Gloucester and Edgar provides.

8 Granville-Barker, 303.

9 Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 1985), 58.

10 In *The Marriage Sacrament of the Church of England*, husbands were, however, instructed to treat their wives gently, and the analogy of Christ loving his Bride, the Church, reminded husbands to do likewise.

11 Chilton Powell, *English Domestic Relations 1487-1653* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), 132-33.

12 Tillyard, 24.

13 Edward Vernon Utterson, ed., *Select Pieces of Early Popular Poetry*, II (London: Printed by T. Davison for Longman, Hurst Rees, Orme, Brown, Pasternoster-Row, 1818), 70.

14 Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 215.

15 Charles Carroll Camden, "Iago on Women," *JEGP*, XLVIII (1949), 70.

16 Rosenberg, 5. Rosenberg footnotes this rare "review" of the play as follows: "From a Latin letter quoted in Geoffrey Tillotson, *Othello* and *The Alchemist* at Oxford," *TLS*, July 20, 1933, 494.

17 Utterson, 52.

18 Utterson, 85. *The Schole House of Women* has been attributed to Edward Gosenhill by Louis B. Wright, but Utterson lists it as anonymous. It is, however, typical of the many writings by anti-feminist satirists of the day.

19 Louis B. Wright, "The Popular Controversy over Woman," *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*. Huntington Library Publications. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 224.

20 There is, however, no simple progression from the passive to the active or strong woman character in Shakespeare; the evolution is more circuitous than straight forward. Ophelia in *Hamlet*, for example, is found

after Beatrice in *Much Ado*. If an attempt at classification is to be made in terms of active versus passive women, however, what Craig calls "The Comedies of the Second Period" would include a high incidence of active women. These plays include *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1597), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-99), *As You Like It* (1599-1600), and *Twelfth Night* (1599-1600). What these plays have in common, with the exception of *Much Ado*, is the device of the male disguise (that is, boys playing girls pretending to be boys), thus, on a theoretical level at least, allowing them to enter the male world on equal terms. Other examples of this device are found in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1598), a very early play, and *Cymbeline* (1609-1610), a very late play.

21 Anne Barton, "Introduction to *Much Ado About Nothing*," *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 327-328.

22 Hardin Craig, ed., *Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman, 1961), 531. Craig sees Claudio's action as a kind of convention in the Renaissance: The Italian novel dealt in sensational plots, like the rejection of an innocent maid at the altar, which suited the taste of the Renaissance." An even stronger basis for Claudio's action, I think, is his belief in the frailty of woman, which has both Italian and English roots, and which serves as the basis for the anti-feminist tradition.

23 Rosalind, Viola, and Paulina have similar lines.

24 Granville-Barker, 79.

25 Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 196-7.

26 L. C. Knights, *An Approach to Hamlet* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 65.

27 Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1928), 99. For an illuminating discussion of Hamlet's predicament, see Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, 233-239.

28 All references to this play will be taken from C. F. Tucker Brooke and Nathaniel Burton Paradise, eds. *English Drama 1580-1642* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1933), 297-323.

29 Peter Ure, "Marriage and the Domestic Drama in Heywood and Ford," *English Studies*, XXXII (1951), 216.

30 Hardin Craig, *The Enchanted Glass* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 131-132.

III

Speaking Daggers: A Study of Male Rage

Violence need not be only physical; it can also be verbal. My purpose in this chapter is to show how a kind of verbal violence appears as a corollary to the masculine code. From the callow utterances of a Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing* to the imagistic orgy of Hamlet and the jealous ravings of Othello, we find in the involuted style of Leontes' speech a perfected image of a mind gone mad with jealousy, rage, and domination, and in Ferdinand's speech patterns in *The Duchess of Malfi*, a mind grown perverse with pride and sexual frustration until it collapses into lycanthropy.

Let us begin with a consideration of Shakespeare's relatively early handling of the outraged male character, Claudio, to see how he progressed from a somewhat stiff and stilted style to a complex and free-flowing one in order to depict male rage. In the public denunciation of Hero, Claudio's immaturity could be said to be reflected in the jerky, jejune movements of his speech. Immediately preceding Claudio's flagrant disavowal of Hero in church, we find a dissembling Claudio who first asks Leonato:

> Father, by your leave,
> Will you with free and unconstrained soul
> Give me this maid, your daughter?
> (IV.i.23-25)

Leonato answers without question, "As freely, son, as God did give her me." Claudio then asks,

> And what have I to give you back whose worth
> May counterpoise this rich and precious gift?

and Leonato again answers serenely, "Nothing, unless you render her again."

It is at this point that Claudio explodes with his public denunciation of Hero in church; behind his attempt at self-control he finally reveals himself as a man enraged by what he assumes to be a personal affront to his manly honor. In the speech which follows we find a familiar denunciation of woman, here addressed to the wronged and innocent Hero, and the male bond remains intact as Don Pedro concludes by siding with his masculine friend. "Sweet Prince, you learn me noble thankfulness," Claudio begins with disguised civility, and then the volcanic fury erupts:

> There, Leonato, take her back again.
> Give not this rotten orange to your friend,
> She's but the sign and semblance of her honor.
> Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
> O, what authority and show of truth
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
> Comes not that blood as modest evidence
> To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,
> All you that see her, that she were a maid,
> By these exterior shows? But she is none:
> She knows the heat of a luxurious bed;
> Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.
> *Leon.* What do you mean, my lord?
> *Claud.* Not to be married,
> Not to knit my soul to an approved wanton.
> *Leon.* Dear my lord, if you, in your own proof,
> Have vanquish'd the resistance of your youth,
> And made defeat of her virginity—
> *Claud.* I know what you would say. If I have known her,
> You will say, she did embrace me as a husband,
> And so extenuate the 'forehand sin.
> No, Leonato,
> I never tempted her with word too large,
> But as a brother to his sister, show'd
> Bashful sincerity and comely love.
> *Hero.* And seem'd I ever otherwise to you?
> *Claud.* Out on thee seeming! I will write against it:
> You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
> As chaste as in the bud ere it be blown;
> But you are more intemperate in your blood
> Than Venus, or those pamp'red animals
> That rage in savage sensuality.

Hero. Is my lord well, that he doth speak so wide?
Leon. Sweet Prince, why speak not you?
D. Pedro. What should I speak?
I stand dishonor'd that have gone about
To link my dear friend to a common stale.
(IV.i.31-65)

Aside from an idealized classical allusion to Diana, Claudio's language reveals abrupt staccato rhythms which accentuate the assault he is making upon Hero's name. "Rotten orange," "wanton," and the concluding allusion to "Venus, or those pamp'red animals / That rage in savage sensuality" reflect his own debased mind, not Hero's, who like Desdemona and Ophelia, cannot understand the fury or the meaning behind his words. And yet his stance and his language are totally familiar to his audience: he is the outraged fiancé or husband or father, a power to be reckoned with. Only on a closer examination of his speech does he reveal his own individual immaturity.

The burden of this speech might be paraphrased as follows: The lady is not what she seems. But the irony is that Claudio is not what *he* seems—he would like to play the offended, innocent male who "as a brother to his sister, show'd / Bashful sincerity and comely love." There is a tone of self-righteousness in Claudio's stance which strangely contradicts with his proclivity for relishing images of Venus in the sty, much as Hamlet is, at times, wont to do.

However, unlike Hamlet, Claudio is no intellectual; his relative simplicity is revealed in his use of short declarative sentences and staccato strikes at Hero's name. In terms of a complex poetic presentation, there is very little to say about Claudio precisely because he is not a complex, but a simple character. Apart from the device of simple contrast (Dian versus Venus; "Not to knit my soul to an approved wanton"), Claudio's speech seems to characterize him of capable of little more than name calling, and the regularity of meter marks his speech as an early experiment with the display of male rage. Anne Barton assesses his character correctly, I think, when she says that "Essentially, Claudio is a man who thinks he has been duped in a bargain, not a Troilus whose whole world shatters

around him because he has to recognize that the goddess of his idolatry is false" (in her introduction to the play in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 328). In short, Claudio's direct, even bludgeoning, speech characterizes him as a novice in the male sport of invective against women.

Hamlet's speech patterns vary more than those of the conventional Claudio. He moves from clever quibbling in his first encounter with the King and his mother, to philosophical questioning of all women, to a vindictive tirade against Ophelia. His first extended instance of outrage comes in Act One, scene two, where in a controlled, philosophical manner, he speculates on his mother's wrongs:

> That it should come [to this]!
> But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two.
> So excellent a king; that was to this
> Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
> That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
> Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
> Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—
> Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman!—
> A little month, or ere those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears—why, she, [even she]—
> O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
> Would have mourn'd longer—married with my uncle,
> My father's brother, but no more like my father
> Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
> Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
> Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
> She married—O most wicked speed: to post
> With such dexterity to incestious sheets,
> It is not, nor it cannot come to good,
> But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.
> (I.ii.137-159)

Here, as in Claudio's speech, contrasts occur between the image of Hamlet's father, who is likened to Hyperion and Claudius to a satyr, while Gertrude is compared to Niobe. But the clearest indictment comes as a flashback when Hamlet recalls how his mother once doted on his father and ends with the famous line which carries the long burden of the anti-

feminist tradition behind it: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" Further, Hamlet's penchant for the remembrance of time past is revealed when he pictures Gertrude as "Like Niobe, all tears:" only, in a more dramatic shift than Claudio is capable of, to contrast this image with rhetorical emphasis—

> why she, [even she]—
> O God, a beast, that wants discourse of reason
> Would have mourn'd longer—married with my uncle . . .
> (I.ii.149-151)

The effect produced is at once more complex than Claudio's, as Hamlet intersperses elliptical clauses throughout his reverie in order to create, beyond simple contrast, a mind fluctuating between past and present, ideal and debased. Unlike Claudio, Hamlet's speech patterns crowd multiple, conflicting ideas which race through his mind in a manner too fast to be captured by simple declarative statement or contrast. In ordering conflicting images in a complex manner, Shakespeare succeeds in characterizing Hamlet as an artist grappling to impose order on a chaos of emotions and ideas.

Added to this ability to order fluctuating ideas, is Hamlet's artistic proclivity for conjuring up vivid images, rather than acting upon them. In "The Art of Cruelty: Hamlet and Vindice," *Shakespeare Survey*, 26, R. A. Foakes provides an illuminating commentary on Hamlet's verbal violence which he foists upon the two women in the play.

> Hamlet shows a kind of cruelty twice in the play, once when he turns on Ophelia, recognizing that she is a decoy, and later when he speaks savagely to his mother. He lashes verbally the two women he loves, and his behaviour here is not, as is sometimes argued, merely a reflection of his revulsion against sex, or of his hatred of the corruption he sees around him; it relates also, and more deeply, to his imaginative engagement with, and recoil from, the horror within himself. The cruelty expressed in words is also a substitute for action, an outlet for what he knows is in him, and might perhaps be seen too as vicariously satisfying the conscious urge to drive himself to a deed of cruelty, to revenge. His attack on Ophelia springs from an inquisition into himself, beginning in the soliloquy 'To be or not to be', in which, amongst other things, a dejected Hamlet attempts to reckon with the need for action, the task of taking arms against Claudius, in the recognition that 'the pale cast of thought' is inimical to action; the self-inspection deepens into the hyperbole of his words to Ophelia:

> 'I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in.'
>
> (III,i,125)

He has a sense of a potential in himself for unimagined, or unimaginable offences, but those we are aware of in him exist mostly in his mind or imagination. So when he confronts his mother in the Closet scene, it is to recreate in imagination, and with a nastiness belonging to his conception, to him more than to the deed itself, the activity of sexual relations between Claudius and his mother:

> 'Nay, but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
> Stewed in corruption, honeying, and making love
> Over the nasty sty . . .'
>
> (III,iv,91-4)

The obscenity is inside Hamlet, and bursts out in a savagery of words; if these help to bring Ophelia to suicide, and afflict Gertrude so that she cries

> 'These words like daggers enter in mine ears,'
>
> (III,iv,95)

nevertheless, these attacks are essentially different from the deed this line recalls, Claudius pouring poison into the ears of Old Hamlet. Ophelia cannot comprehend what Hamlet says, and both she and, initially at any rate, Gertrude, are inclined to think his outbursts are expressions of madness. I think rather that Hamlet gives rein to his tongue as an alternative to the action he cannot face; and his ability to give bitterness vent in words to them, and yet refrain from a willed or planned killing, is exactly what we might expect.[1]

Foakes's analysis is illuminating for many reasons, foremost among them is the idea that Hamlet's murderous rage lies within himself, and that he is prone to transfer his inability to perform the act of revenge into angry verbal assaults upon Ophelia and Gertrude. Another important speech which suggests that Hamlet is aware of the latent cruelty within him comes in a preparatory scene before he encounters Gertrude where he soliloquizes:

> Soft, now to my mother.
> O heart, lose not thy nature! let not ever
> The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom,
> Let me be cruel, not unnatural;

> I will speak [daggers] to her, but use none.
> My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites—
> How in my words somever she be shent,
> To give them seals never my soul consent!
> (III.ii.392-399)

Here Hamlet is aware that his murderous rage needs restraint; he would not be a murderer of his mother, as was Nero. He promises to "speak [daggers] to her, but use none." And so he does, except that, in the process, he uses one on poor Polonius. As Foakes reminds us, "When he does kill, it is in a fit of excitement, and an unpremediated act, stabbing blindly through the arras, not a planned murder. The death of Polonius fastens a guilt on him," (27), and, it seems to me, that he then transfers this guilt upon his mother, making her act of remarriage a worse sin than his own.

In essence, Hamlet's vivid imagination marks him as a poet, a maker of images, not a wilful murderer. The act of revenge which his father's ghost foists upon him is inimical to his nature, and he can find an outlet for his inner division only in words and images. Characteristically, the ones who suffer most from his dilemma are the women in the play who bear the brunt of his verbal abuse.

I have been a bit hard on Hamlet, largely because I see his stance as typically masculine in its transference of his guilt onto the assumed generalized guilt of woman as a descendant of Eve. For a less critical assessment of Hamlet's character, Foakes concludes: "In the action Hamlet does, in fact, reveal what is most deep within him, not, so to speak, consciously, not even in the soliloquies, but in projecting imaginatively, into art, into shows, into plays within the play, or the rhetoric of his encounters with Ophelia and Gertrude, a sense of the potential for cruelty and viciousness in himself. Shakespeare makes this art the vehicle of the moral restraint Hamlet exercises upon what is within. The combination of his full imaginative grasp of the horror of a cruelty he recognizes as potentially in himself, with a moral revulsion from it of which he is unconscious, or at best obscurely aware, perhaps helps to explain why Hamlet remains both an enigma and Shakespeare's best-loved hero" (31).

While Hamlet's disillusionment is evident in his first speech, Othello's is progressive and torturous: we watch him turn from an idealist to a cynic during the space of the play. The conflict in Othello's mind is further reflected in his speech. Once his suspicion has been aroused, he finds great difficulty in reconciling the conflicting images of Desdemona's supposed wantonness and her former innocence. One such example of Othello's mental struggle follows:

> Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned to-night, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turn'ed to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter creature! she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks.
>
> (IV.i.181-185)

Othello's irresolution temporarily stops, however, when Iago says, "If you are so fond over her iniquity, give her patent to offend, for if it touch not you, it comes near nobody" (IV.i.197-198). And Othello erupts with the violent and climactic outburst: "I will chop her into messes. Cuckold me!" (IV.i.200).

Othello's deadly interrogation of Desdemona in the next scene already has been dealt with and serves the function of presenting him in the role of physician-priest, much as Hamlet's intimidation of Gertrude in the Closet-scene serves to delineate him as poet-priest.

But even now, resolved to murder, the terrible conflict appears again in Othello. He will murder her, but shed no blood; the qualifying continues:

> It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;
> Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,
> It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
> Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
> And smooth as monumental alabaster.
> Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
>
> (V.ii.1-6)

Not only is this speech typical of Othello's continuing irresolution but, just as significantly, of his allegiance to the male; rather than the marital, bond. "Yet she must die, else she'll

betray more men" shows Othello's capitulation to the anti-feminist world of Iago—it is the battle cry of male revenge.

And it is also his down-fall. In *The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies*, Matthew N. Proser summarizes his weakness in accepting Iago's perception as follows:

> Othello's great limitation, then, like that of Brutus or Macbeth, is a habit of mind he comes to adopt. His fault lies in his way of "seeing" things, and as Heilman says, this manner of perception is associated with Iago's way of "seeing" things. According to this interpretation, Iago manages to impose upon Othello a point of view which accepts "facts" as proof" of Desdemona's infidelity, but in a situation demanding not proofs but the delicacy of the instincts. Iago's mind, mechanistic and legalistic in its limitations, succeeds in transferring these limitations to Othello's mind. In Heilman's words, 'When Othello decides to follow Iago and be 'wise' and 'cunning,' he adopts . . . a new code; he will 'see' the facts, get the 'evidence,' 'prove' his case, and execute 'justice.'
>
> This 'new' code, however, proves to be related to Iago's style of speaking. Iago's 'facts' and 'proofs' in the crucial temptation scene are actually rhetorical devices by means of which Iago encourages Othello to create a damaging conception of himself. Actually the 'facts' and 'proofs' of Desdemona's infidelity cannot exist because Desdemona has not been unfaithful. Therefore the chief tool in the temptation scene is language, or the rhetorical use of language: it is by means of words alone that Iago convinces Othello of Desdemona's infidelity. The words become the 'facts' and 'proofs' in the case.[2]

Thus in accepting Iago's code, he has lost his own. Further, Othello's earlier imaginative leaps which allowed him to tell of his travels have—dwindled to a preoccupation with concrete reality, with mundane details. "That handkerchief which I so lov'd, and gave thee / Thou gavest to Cassio," shows his present preoccupation with things. In his mind the evidence of the handkerchief is solid evidence of her guilt, just as in *Hamlet*, his own images are.

Having murdered Desdemona, Othello hears Emilia's voice, and his disordered mind is reflected in the confused pattern of his speech—gone now is simple contrast; his speech shows the chaos within himself:

> Yes.—'Tis Emilia.—By and by. She's dead.
> 'Tis like she comes to speak of Cassio's death;

> The noise was high. Hah, no more moving?
> Still as the grave. Shall she come in? Were't good?
> I think she stirs again. No. What's best to do?
> If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife.
> My wife, my wife! what wife? I have no wife.
> O insupportable! O heavy hour!
> Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
> Of sun and moon, and that th' affrighted globe
> Did yawn at alteration.
> (V.ii.91-101)

In the darkness of Othello's mind, madness rages as he speaks in staccato rhythms which punctuate his guilt. Beside the confused wavering of his mind, one word is repeated four times, followed once with a comma, once by an exclamation, once by a question mark, and finally by a period. The word, of course, is "wife." And it marks Othello's progression from acceptance, to passion, to questioning, to the blankness of stark fact. It never had so electrifying a sound.

There is, however, one more reference which would, no doubt, have caused eerie reverberations in the ears of an Elizabethan audience. When Othello says, "Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse / Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe / Should yawn at aleration," he is speaking of chaos; he is saying that his killing of Desdemona should create a cosmic catastrophe. Again let Tillyard remind us, "To us 'chaos' means hardly more than confusion on a large scale; to an Elizabethan it meant the cosmic anarchy before creation and the wholesale dissolution that would result if the pressure of Providence relaxed and allowed the law of nature to cease functioning. Othello's 'chaos is come again. . . .' cannot be fully felt apart from orthodox theology" (24).

Thus in the mangled mass of this speech, Shakespeare has served us two ingredients traditionally thought of as defining tragedy: the arousal of pity and fear. However, in this play, with Iago as Othello's demi-devil, Shakespeare has come close to providing a Black Mass, the end of which is madness, murder, and mayhem. For Iago has helped to destroy Othello's inherently noble nature, and has left him with nothing but a new code, which led the way to chaos.

There is, however, another husband who out-Othello's Othello in his use of involutional language of domination and rage—Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*. While Othello is pressured into a false conception of Desdemona by Iago, Leontes' mad fit stems from within himself; alone he reaches a pitch of jealous fury unmatched by any other character in Shakespeare's canon.

Set in the pastoral world of Sicilia and Bohemia and labelled a romance, *The Winter's Tale* presents in Leontes a male character so maddened by jealous rage that the first three acts are nothing less than a tragic world. More immediately striking for our purposes, however, is Shakespeare's depiction of a male mind grown mad with jealousy—so mad, in fact, that one of Leontes' speeches has been called incomprehensible. But this, I believe, was Shakespeare's purpose: Leontes' madness is revealed in the very incomprehensibility of his speech.

After observing Hermione and Polixenes together in Act One, scene two, Leontes' growing rage is unleashed in an aside:

> Too hot, too hot!
> To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.
> I have tremor cordis on me; my heart dances,
> But not for joy; not joy. This entertainment
> May a free face put on, derive a liberty
> From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,
> And well become the agent; 't may—I grant.
> But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
> As now they are, and making practis'd smiles,
> As in the looking-glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere
> The mort o' th' deer—O, that is entertainment
> My bosom likes not, nor my brows! Mamillius,
> Art thou my boy?
>
> (I.ii.108-119)

In speaking of the irregular rhythms of these lines, Horace Howard Furness is correct, I think, when he says: "Abbott suggests expedients whereby these lines, of twelve syllables each, may be reduced to regular iambic pentameters. But such attempts are futile, not only in impassioned dialogue, but in soliloquies like the present. While this jealous mania pos-

sesses Leontes, it is noticeable that his speech is disconnected, disjointed, with many repetitions—a characteristic of madness. It is sufficient that each sentence, or fragment of a sentence, is in itself rhythmical."[3]

To attempt to "regularize" this speech is absurd; it would reduce Leontes' speech to the mechanical rhythms of a jejune Claudio. Furness sees the point exactly: that Shakespeare uses this method of irregular speech patterns in order to project Leontes' madness. In one line Leontes jumps from "I have tremor cordis on me" to "my heart dances" just as he leaps from a consideration of the two adults before him to the question of his son's legitimacy. And just as there is no logic in his leaps, aside from that of a jealous mind, there is no regularity in the meter.

Similarly, Leontes' subsequent speech in which he inveighs against women and lapses into incomprehensibility is, I think, intentional on Shakespeare's part, for it shows a mind growing progressively disordered. To attempt to glean a clear meaning from these lines, as numerous nineteenth century critics tried to do is, again, futile, for, as Pafford says in his introduction to the play in the Arden edition, the speech was intended to be incoherent.[4]

After Mamillius answers that he is indeed Leontes' son, Leontes releases the following confused and increasingly convoluted speech:

> Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have,
> To be full like me; yet they say we are
> Almost as like as eggs; women say so—
> That will say any thing: but were they false
> As o'er-dy'd blacks, as wind, as waters, false
> As dice are to be wish'd by one that fixes
> No bourn 'twixt his and mine, yet were it true
> To say this boy were like me. Come, sir page,
> Look on me with your welkin eye. Sweet villain!
> Most dear'st! my collop! Can thy dam?—may't be?—
> Affection! thy intention stabs the centre:
> Thou dost make possible things not so held,
> Communicat'st with dreams (how can this be?),
> And what's unreal thou co-active art,
> And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent
> Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost,
> (And that beyond commission), and I find it

(And that to the infection of my brains
And hard'ning of my brows).
(I.ii.128-146)

While the first nine lines of this speech are comprehensible in that they continue with the legitimacy theme and the satirizing of women, the line beginning "Affection! thy intention stabs the centre:" is difficult to follow, and has been glossed by Craig to read: "amorous affection by power goes straight to the center; a puzzling line."[5] I find Craig's gloss more puzzling, however, than the original, which at least communicates a sense of subterranean confusion, and Leontes' struggle with an overpowering emotion. Perhaps G. Blakemore Evans, the textual editor of *The Riverside Edition*, furnishes the most helpful analysis of this passage when he says, "The crucial word is "affection," which in Shakespeare often means "sexual desire" and is usually so explained in this passage. But here it is much more plausibly "affectio," in the sense used by Cicero, which Cooper's Latin dictionary (1584 ed.) defines as 'a disposition or mutation happening to bodie or minde: trouble of minde.' Leontes is accordingly talking not about the supposed passion of Hermione and Polixenes, but about his own jealousy, as Macbeth in soliloquy talks about his vaulting ambition."[6]

But even more important than the meaning of the words in this instance, it seems to me, is the jerky, involuted style which signals Leontes' downward plunge into an associative, jealous frenzy. A. C. Bradley accurately describes the strange texture of the language of this play when he says:

> After *Hamlet* the style, in the more emotional passages, is heightened. It becomes grander, sometimes wilder, sometimes more swelling, even tumid. It is also more concentrated, rapid, varied, and, in construction, less regular, not seldom twisted or elliptical. It is, therefore, not so easy and lucid, and in the more ordinary dialogue it is sometimes involved and obscure. . . .
>
> On the other hand, it is always full of life and movement, and in great passages produces sudden, strange, electrifying effects. . . . But readers who object to passages where the sense has rather to be discerned beyond the words than found in them will admit that, in traversing the impatient throng of thoughts not always completely embodied, their minds move through an astonishing variety of ideas and experiences,

> and that a style less generally poetic than that of *Hamlet* is also a style more invariable dramatic.[7]

This analysis by Bradley appears more fitting than James Sutherland's criticism which detects a tiredness in the language of the last plays and maintains that at times "Shakespeare is *not* writing correctly: he is writing at speed."[8] When one traces the progression in Shakespeare's art of presenting the jealously inflamed Claudio, Hamlet, Othello, and Leontes, it becomes clear, I think, that in Leontes he has perfected his method of presenting a man crazed by jealousy, for in Leontes, the style is the substance whereby Shakespeare projects Leontes' madness. Even more convincingly, the fact that Polixenes is made to ask, "What means Sicilia? immediately after Leontes' disturbing speech supports the thesis that Leontes' speech was intended to be at least partially incomprehensible to those who heard it.

But purposeful incoherence is not the only method Shakespeare uses to portray the jealous Leontes. M. M. Mahood devotes a chapter of her book, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (1957; rpt. London: Methuen, 1968), 146-163, to a discussion of the instances of ironic punning in *The Winter's Tale.* In Act One, scene two, for example, Leontes tells Polixenes: "Let what is dear in Sicily be cheap:" The torrent of word-play becomes increasingly sexually obsessed and misogynic when, after the exit of Polixenes and Hermione, Leontes overflows with the following punning outburst:

> Gone already!
> Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a fork'd one!
> Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays and I
> Play too, but so disgrac'd a part, whose issue
> Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamor
> Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. There have been
> (Or I am much deceiv'd) cuckolds ere now,
> And many a man there is (even at this present,
> Now, while I speak this) holds his wife by th' arm,
> That little thinks she has been sluic'd in 's absence,
> And his pond fish'd by his next neighbor—by
> Sir Smile, his neighbor. Nay, there's comfort in't,
> Whiles other men have gates, and those gates open'd,
> As mine, against their will. Should all despair
> That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind

> Would hang themselves. Physic for't there's none.
> It is a bawdy planet, that will strike
> Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis pow'rful—think it—
> From east, west, north, and south. Be it concluded,
> No barricado for a belly. Know't,
> It will let in and out the enemy,
> With bag and baggage. Many thousand on 's
> Have the disease, and feel't not. How now, boy?
> (I.ii.185-207)

In lines 187-89, G. Blakemore Evans notes that "Leontes puns on three senses of "play": (1) amuse yourself, (2) engage in sexual dalliance, (3) act a part; and on three senses of "issue": (1) outcome, (2) offspring, (3) exit."[9] In this speech only the first injunction of "play" is used in the conventional sense of to have fun or to amuse oneself. The reference to "thy mother plays" is obviously derisive, with the implication that she "plays" with or upon Polixenes. Leontes' next leap to a consideration of his own role in the line "I play too, but so disgrac'd a part" shows himself playing the role of the deceived husband.

After the initial punning upon "play" and "issue," an elaborate image of the seduction of wives by neighbors is presented, in which the word "gates" has a double meaning. The theme of the deceived husband is carried out in the concluding images, which link the cuckold's plight to a debased world where there is "no barricado for a belly."

The punning is found again in Leontes' sudden start at his servant Camillo's use of the word "satisfy." When Leontes asks why Polixenes has agreed to stay, Camillo answers simply: "To satisfy your highness and the entreaties / Of our most gracious mistress." But Leontes sees the word in a sexual light and erupts: "Satisfy! / The entreaties of your mistress! satisfy!"

From now on Leontes' imaginings race into increasingly insidious indictments of Hermione, marked first with a kind of reckless energy in:

> Ha' not you seen, Camillo
> (But that's past doubt; you have, or your eye-glass
> Is thicker than a cuckold's horn), or heard
> (For to a vision so apparent rumor

Cannot be mute), or thought (for cogitation
Resides not in that man that does not think)
My wife is slippery? If thou wilt confess,
Or else be impudently negative,
To have nor eyes nor ears nor thought, then say
My wife's a [hobby]-horse, deserves a name
As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
Before her troth-plight: say't and justify't.
(I.ii.268-278)

The turbulent rhythms of this passage cascade in Leontes' next tirade where most sentences end as questions, and the use of repetition is noticeable, recalling similar passages from *Othello* and *Lear*. To the reluctant Camillo, Leontes continues in a fit of rising fury:

Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh (a note infallible
Of breaking honesty)? horsing foot on foot?
Skulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift?
Hours, minutes? noon, midnight? and all eyes
Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
If this be nothing.
(I.ii.284-295)

Here the staccato rhythms and repetition of the word "nothing," which is by now a commonplace connoting personal and cosmic despair, are used to mark Leontes as a man grown mad with jealousy. Camillo instinctively recognizes that Leontes is ill, saying, "Good my lord, be cur'd / Of this diseas'd opinion, and betimes, / For 'tis most dangerous." The evenness of Camillo's reply serves to contrast with Leontes' bludgeoning speech pattern. When he turns on Camillo for not agreeing with his deluded hypothesis—"You lie, you lie: I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee," we see the jealous man turned tyrant. By the use of puns, repetition, and disjointed and involutional rhythms of his speech, Shakespeare

has presented us with the consummate portrait of a twisted mind.

Apart from a consideration of poetic devices used in this play, there is the question of meter. In the earlier play of *Much Ado About Nothing* in which Claudio plays the role of the deceived fiancé, there is a consistently regular rhythm to the blank verse. Hardin Craig, for example, finds but two instances of light or weak endings, suggesting, on the whole, a regular iambic pentameter rhythm, with the exception of prose passages. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, which is generally dated 1610-11, late in Shakespeare's career, the incidence of light or weak endings jumps to one hundred, exceeded only by *Coriolanus* with one hundred and four and *Cymbeline* with one hundred and thirty.

Similarly, according to Craig, "feminine endings increase as Shakespeare's development progesses"[10] so that the effect achieved in the later plays is a less mechanical adherence to regular blank verse, which can become monotonous. In Leontes' speeches what we find is a far cry from monotony. Rather, we find an insistent, strident energy which unfolds the darker recesses of his mind. If Claudio was limited to name-calling and simple contrast, Hamlet to anti-feminist invective and an imagistic orgy, Othello to the emotional paralysis of conflicting images, Leontes is limited by nothing. His speech is the last convoluted swan song of a dangerous species: the jealous husband. Of Posthumus (another jealous husband in *Cymbeline*) and Leontes, Hallet Smith says in *Shakespeare's Romances* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1972), 176, "[both speeches] are self-conscious, rhetorical, and tortured in syntax and strange in vocabulary." It is fitting that this should be so, for in their rage against their wives their minds were equally tortured and strange. This was Shakespeare's marriage of method and mind.

The final rhetorical stance I wish to consider is that of Ferdinand in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. In a section on language in his introduction to the Revels Plays edition, John Russell Brown deals with the word-play in *The Duchess*, and suggests that "'*Doubles entendres*' are concentrated at special points: in the public scenes between the duchess and Antonio

to show their sexual instincts secretly or unthinkingly controlling their words, and, more remarkably, in Ferdinand's speeches almost every time he is on stage before his sister's death, giving even to some of his lightest talk a half-hidden sexual urgency. In a tragedy of love, such effects are crucial."[11]

In the first exchange between Ferdinand and the Duchess we find a striking example of such *doubles entendres.* After warning her not to remarry, Ferdinand then gives the following advice, which ends with an allusion to the male organ; an allusion which he elaborates upon in a succeeding speech, much to the Duchess's discomfort. "You are my sister—" he begins,

> This was my father's poniard: do you see?
> I'd be loth to see't look rusty, 'cause 'tws his;—
> I would have you to give o'er these chargeable revels;
> A visor and a mask are whispering-rooms
> That were ne'er built for goodness: fare ye well—
> And women like that part which, like the lamprey,
> Hath ne'er a bone in't.
>
> *Duch.* Fie sir!
> Nay,
> I mean the tongue: variety of courtship;—
> What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale
> Make a woman believe? Farewell, lusty widow.
> (I.i.330-340)

The first *double entendre* is cast in the concluding lines of his first speech with the Duchess almost as an aside, but, as Brown suggests, the sexual urgency which it reflects is hardly incidental. Further, Ferdinand's manipulation of the Duchess is evident in the subsequent speech, which follows the Duchess's interjection, as he attempts to diminish the lasciviousness of his first retort, only to compound it with a second. For those unacquainted with ichthyology, Brown glosses the lamprey as an "eel-like fish with sucker mouth [which] 'swimmeth all whole in flexible sort, and all alike bending hir bodye (*Green Forest*, quoted by Brown, 28).

The intensity of Ferdinand's sexual fascination with the Duchess mounts to a feverish pitch when, in Act Two, scene

five, he discovers that his sister has given birth to a son. To his brother, the Cardinal, he says, "Read there—a sister damn'd; she's loose i' th' hilts; / Grown a notorious strumpet." Here Ferdinand moves from the *double entendre* to the direct image. Brown glosses the term "loose i' th' hilts:" as "unchaste. A 'hilt' is the handle of a sword or dagger. The phrase was used proverbially in several ways (*cf.* Tilley H_{472}), but the first record in *O.E.D.* of this sexual connotation is Howell, *Cotgrave's Dict.* (1650), Ded.: "In French '*Cocu*' is taken for one whose wife is loose in the hilts" (63).

When the Cardinal urges Ferdinand to "Speak lower," Ferdinand erupts into a compounded picture of her lust, imagining that "She hath had most cunning bawds to serve her turn, / and more secure conveyances for lust / Than towns of garrison for service."

Anti-feminist invective follows between both the Cardinal and Ferdinand, with the latter's rage growing murderous. Othello's climactic line—I'll hew her into messes. Cuckold me!" is equalled by Ferdinand's vicious vow—. . . . make soft lint for his mother's wounds, / When I have hew'd her into pieces."

Ferdinand then presents a startling image which reveals both his increasingly unstable state and the weight of Renaissance prejudice against women. "Methinks I see her laughing—" he cries, and then brands her as bestial: "Excellent hyena!—talk to me somewhat, quickly, / Or my imagination will carry me / To see her, in the shameful act of sin." John Russell Brown glosses the first two lines as follows: "The cry of a 'hyena' sounds like a laugh. Topsell's *Four-Footed Beasts* (1607), (435-42), distinguishes four kinds of hyena. The 'first and vulgar kind' cannot 'see one quarter so perfectly in the day as in the night; . . . the female is far more subtill then the male, and therefore more seldome taken . . .' She can kill a sleeping man 'with . . . some secret worke of nature by stretching her body vpon him'. So the animal became a type of treachery, especially in women." (65-66).[12]

When the Cardinal asks, "With whom?" Ferdinand reveals his voyeur-like proclivities, lustfully embellishing upon the physicality of her lover:

> Happily with some strong theigh'd bargeman;
> Or one o' th' wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge,
> Or toss the bar, or else some lovely squire
> That carries coals up to her privy lodgings.
> (II.v.42-45)

The Cardinal correctly sees that Ferdinand's preoccupation is excessive, and tells him, "You fly beyond your reason." But Ferdinand does not hear the words—he is lost in his own diseased sexual fantasy: "Go to, mistress!" he apostrophises the absent Duchess, "'Tis not your whore's milk that shall quench my wild-fire, / But your whore's blood."

Only for a moment does a fleeting recognition emerge that the fault lies not in the Duchess, but in himself and his brother when he says to the Cardinal:

> I could kill her now,
> In you, or in myself, for I do think
> It is some sin in us, heaven doth revenge
> By her.
> (II.v.63-65)

But the Cardinal will not share the recognition of guilt: "Are you stark mad?" he rejoins. And Ferdinand turns murderous, spewing his sadistic rage in an apex of hellish grotesquerie:

> I would have their bodies
> Burnt in a coal-pit, with the ventage stopp'd,
> That their curs'd smoke might not ascend to heaven.
> Or dip the sheets they lie in, in pitch or sulphur,
> Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match;
> Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis,
> And give 't his lecherous father, to renew
> The sin of his back.
> (II.v.67-73)

If a similar, although less terrifying, speech by Hamlet in which he tells of delaying to kill the king at prayer in lieu of a more propitious time in which Claudius is gaming or stewing in corruption has been criticized by some as unnecessarily repugnant, what does one make of Ferdinand's speech? It, too, is murderous and sexually obssessed. But there is a difference, not only in the character of the speaker, but in the

dramatic equivalence. Claudius had killed the King; the Duchess has given birth to a son; Claudius is guilty of murder; the Duchess of remarriage.

When Ferdinand concludes this orgy of verbal violence with the intention:

> In, in; I'll go sleep—
> Till I know who leaps my sister, I'll not stir:
> That known, I'll find scorpions to sting my whips,
> And fix her in a general eclipse.
> (II.v.76-79)

he adopts the masculine stance of divine avenger, much as Hamlet and Othello did. Brown quotes I *Kings*, xii.II. for biblical support: "'my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions'" (68).

But perhaps no more fitting metaphor for Ferdinand's madness is found than in Act Three, in which he inflicts bedlam upon the Duchess by appointing several lunatics to "bring her to despair." But before this outrage, he meets her in the dark and presents her with a dead man's hand, which is thought by at least one critic to have possible sexual overtones. Compounded with this grotesquerie is the presentation of "the artificial figures of Antonio and his children, appearing as if they were dead." These sadistic instruments, as well as those of the madmen and the executioner Bosola, serve to bring her to her death, but ultimately not to despair.

Finally, in Act Five, the metaphor of madness is joined with that of bestiality, as the Doctor diagnoses Ferdinand's ailment as lycanthropia, which he defines as follows:

> In those that are possess'd with 't there o'erflows
> Such melancholy humour, they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into wolves,
> Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night,
> And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since
> One met the duke, 'bout midnight in a lane
> Behind Saint Mark's Church, with the leg of a man
> Upon his shoulder; and he howl'd fearfully;
> Said he was a wolf, only the difference
> Was a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,
> His on the inside; bade them take their swords,
> Rip up his flesh, and try; straight I was sent for,

> And having minister'd to him, found his grace
> Very well recovered.
> (V.ii.7-21)

In Ferdinand Webster has shown us what may be called the end result of male rage and domination: madness. If more sensational than Shakespeare, it does strike home the image of man reduced to bestiality, believing himself to be a 'lupus,' a wolf. In Ferdinand we have come face to face with the nadir of masculine authority. Let us turn now to some Elizabethan Little Red Riding-Hoods to see how they, in varying degrees, defied the wicked Wolf.

Notes

1. R. A. Foakes, "The Art of Cruelty: Hamlet and Vindice," *Shakespeare Survey*, IIVI (1973), 27-28.

2. Matthew N. Proser, *The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 110-111.

3. Horace Howard Furness, ed., *The Winter's Tale*, The Variorum Edition (1898; rpt. New York: Dover, 1964), 22.

4. J. H. P. Pafford, ed., *The Winter's Tale*, The Arden Shakespeare (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), lxxxiv-lxxxv. His analysis follows: "The opening conversational prose is a kindly, courtly language, in marked contrast with the poetry which it immediately precedes and in strong dramatic ironical contrast with the tangled, involved speech which is soon to follow. This speech, chiefly of Leontes after the onset of his madness, is frequently cited as the classic example of this kind of language in the late Shakespeare. Many comments on it have been made in addition to those of Bradley, but two simple points are perhaps not sufficiently emphasized. The first is that characters must speak in character, and that Leontes from I.ii.108 to III.ii.141 is a man crazed with jealousy. He is at times incoherent as a jealous man in a state of mad uncertainty must be. His speech is tangled because his mind and emotions are tangled. The second point is only a reminder that a play must be studied as a play in action."

5. Hardin Craig, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 1219.

6. G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1565.

7. Andrew Cecil Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904; rpt. New York: Meridian Books, 1955), 77-78.

8. James Sutherland, "The Language of the Last Plays," in *More Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. John Garrett (New York: 1919), 144-158.

9. Evans, 1572.

10. Craig, *Works of Shakespeare*, 37-38.

11. John Russell Brown, ed., *The Duchess of Malfi* (1964; rpt. London: Methuen, 1969), xlvi. All subsequent references to the play will be from this edition.

12. Brown adds this additional note to his gloss on "hyena": "But since Ferdinand seems to see and hear the duchess as if she were present, Topsell's second kind of 'hyena' may be alluded to: 'their voices are so shrill and sounding, that although they be very remote and farre off, yet do men heare them as if they were hard by . . . they barke onely in the night time'" (66).

IV

The Defiant Woman

In light of the previous discussion, it appears that something is rotten not only in the state of Denmark, but in the social order when the male ego becomes too inflated and extreme. Having examined the effects of verbal violence, we turn now to portraits of women who defied the masculine code and exposed the male ego, when excessive, as a destructive force.

In Shakespeare's canon, no play more successfully portrays such women than the late romance, *The Winter's Tale* (1610-11). In his introduction to the Arden edition, and speaking of the romances in general, J. H. P. Pafford says:

> The young men in *Cymbeline, Pericles, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest,* and particularly in the first three, achieve a new spirit largely by the influence of the young women: indeed the influence, with a power almost divine, of Feminine Beauty and Purity, particularly of the young, is strong in all the plays. In *Cymbeline* and in *Pericles* the young women have to undergo the harshest trials and suffering, comparable with that of the older women in *The Winter's Tale,* whereas the young women in that play and *The Tempest* have no comparable trials and dangers in their adult lives: but Resolute Womanhood, the trials and fortitude of women of noble character accused unjustly and made to suffer unjustly, is a marked theme of every play except *The Tempest.*[1]

It is curious that Shakespeare should show a repeated interest in the plight of "women of noble character accused unjustly and made to suffer unjustly" in the last plays. One wonders, why the recurring interest? Surely it is not to offer that sadistic delight in the suffering of the helpless, which seems all too often to be the contemporary craze. Again and again Shakespeare's sympathies appear to be with the mistreated women, as when Cordelia speaks for truth and Desdemona shines as the ideal, if maligned, wife.

The Winter's Tale presents the image of the jealous husband writ large in the character of Leontes. By now, after Othello, the figure is familiar. A new—or differing—female is found not so much in Hermione, who serves as a Patient Griselda, as in Paulina, who actively defies the raving King, saves his child, shields his wife, and finally in a majestic *tour de force* brings him to his senses by presenting a preserved Hermione. Here Paulina (whose name may significantly suggest a feminine counterpart of St. Paul) serves the Prospero-like role of ordering events; in this very late play a woman ultimately calls the shots.

At the beginning of the play, one finds what appears to be deliberate ambiguity in the language, so that the audience must ask, "Whom should I believe?" In the ceremonial speech of the court, a veil may at first obscure the audience's perceptions.

After the courtly exchange between Camillo and Archidamus in which the boyhood friendship between Leontes and Polixenes is sketched, scene two opens in Leontes' palace as Polixenes, begging leave to return home, utters the first words which may be viewed as equivocal in light of Leontes' subsequent jealous fit. Polixenes begins:

> Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been
> The shepherd's note since we have left our throne
> Without a burthen. Time as long again
> Would be fill'd up, my brother, with our thanks,
> And yet we should, for perpetuity,
> Go hence in debt. And therefore, like a cipher
> (Yet standing in rich place), I multiply
> With one "We thank you" many thousands more
> That go before it.
>
> (I.ii.1-8)

In essence, Polixenes is saying that nine months have passed since leaving his throne; simply a mark of time in ordinary circumstances, but equivocal here in light of Hermione's advanced pregnancy. "Burthen" and "multiply" offer possible *double entendres*, as does "(Yet standing in rich place)." Seen alone, the words are innocuous enough, but when placed in

context with Hermione's pregnancy, and, as we shall see, Leontes' incipient jealousy, they are potentially explosive.

Ironically enough, Leontes himself urges his wife to plead with Polixenes to stay longer: "Tongue-tied our queen? Speak you," he enjoins. When she complies with her husband's wishes and asks Polixenes to stay, she is, in effect, creating her downfall. In the conversation which follows Polixenes introduces the theme of boyish innocence versus a fall through women and marriage to further furnish fuel for Leontes' subsequent fit. On their friendship as boys, Polixenes elaborates:

> We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th' sun,
> And bleat the one at th' other. What we chang'd
> Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
> The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
> That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
> And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
> With stronger blood, we should have answer'd heaven
> Boldly, 'Not guilty'; the imposition clear'd,
> Hereditary ours.
>
> (I.ii.66-74)

When Hermione playfully responds, "By this we gather / You have tripp'd since," Polixenes answers, in effect, that the fault or fall lay with the advent of women, when he says:

> O my most sacred lady,
> Temptations have since then been born to 's: for
> In those unfledg'd days was my wife a girl;
> Your precious self had then not cross'd the eyes
> Of my young playfellow.
>
> (I.ii.76-79)

And Hermione takes up the challenge, only to damn herself in Leontes' eyes:

> Grace to boot!
> Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
> Your queen and I are devils. Yet go on,
> Th' offenses we have made you do we'll answer,
> If you first sinn'd with us, and that with us
> You did continue fault, and that you slipp'd not
> With any but with us.
>
> (I.ii.80-85)

Leontes now misses the playful tone of this repartee, but later remembers the literal meaning, and misreads the collective "us"—the royal form of address—for the personal. So that when Hermione concludes,

> 'Tis Grace indeed.
> Why, lo you now! I have spoke to th' purpose twice:
> The one for ever earn'd a royal husband;
> Th' other for some while a friend.
> (Gives her hand to Polixenes.)
> (I.ii.105-106)

The cumulative ambiguities drive Leontes wild and, with line 108, his rage begins, "(Aside.) Too hot, too hot! / To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods."

More even than Othello, Leontes exemplifies a mind possessed by jealous fury, and the question Shakespeare appears to be posing is this: Whom are we to believe? The suspicions of Leontes or the testimony of Hermione? The word of a man or a woman? In initially hearing the ambiguously presented conversation between Hermione and Polixenes, the audience must make its own decision. Whatever the response, the odds appear stacked against accepting Leontes' perceptions, so involuted and confused are they. Thus it appears that in this late play Shakespeare deliberately undercuts the masculine perception from the start—a departure from the slow reversal of allegiances in *Othello* and *Lear* from the masculine to the feminine.

Hearing of Leontes' rage, Polixenes reasons: "This jealousy / Is for a precious creature: as she's rare, / Must it be great," is a reasonable attempt at diagnosing Leontes' condition, but does not go far enough. It is, after all, not the loss of his wife's love that he laments, but the branding of himself as cuckold that he most fears. Unlike Othello, whom we see as a once noble man, Leontes elicits little sympathy for himself as a man, perhaps because his rage erupts with little struggle. Pafford poses another reason:

> Realistic treatment could make a harsh estimate of Leontes; but he is primarily an agent to bring an evil force rapidly into play. We must accept that he is lovable since he inspires affection in Hermione,

> Paulina, Mamillius, Polixenes, and Camillo. But he is not a great man: what greatness he has comes from his royal position, his mad fury, the magnitude of the disaster he causes and, by reflection, from the greatness and dignity of Hermione: He has none of the kingly graces listed by Malcolm. Little estimate can, however, be made of him before he easily gives way to causeless jealousy and thereby arouses astonishment, anger, and ridicule in those around him, and then, as he himself is made beast-like by his wild fury, inspires terror by violence coupled with royal power. Weakness is also shown in his vacillation, his blustering abusive language, and his anxiety to stand well in public opinion. A man of normal quality and susceptibility would be far more appalled than he is with the realization (as he believes) that he has wantonly murdered a noble and lovely wife, an only and most promising son, and—with particularly vindictive cruelty—an infant daughter. He is not to be examined closely as a man; he is more important as a vehicle, and it is better to concentrate on his jealousy than on his character, for Shakespeare uses him to show mad jealousy, and this picture is real enough (lxxi-lxxii).

Perhaps. But to only see Leontes as a kind of symbolic destructive force is to forget, I think, that he is the jealous husband incarnate, by now a familiar figure. He also adopts the role of avenger. Of this Eleanor Prosser says, "His mad jealousy awakens a greedy obsession with revenge not a desire for justice. When obscene images first rise in his seething mind, he immediately orders the murder of his wife's supposed lover; when that plot fails, he decides, 'for present vengeance / Take it on her' (II.iii.22-23). The purpose of the 'just and open trial' he announces is not to determine Hermione's guilt, for in the same breath he adds that his heart will be burdened until she is dead (II.iii.205-6). As in *Othello*, doubting a faithful wife is folly, but taking upon oneself the right to punish is madness."[2]

Compounded with the fact that Leontes is the prototype of the jealous husband is that he is also a jealous tyrant. Whether or not the tyrant-king should be dethroned is never broached; whether or not he should be taught that his course his disastrous, is. Shakespeare furnishes one sure agent to instruct him—the force of the news that his son, Mamillius, is dead. Only the loss of the male heir can return him to his senses with an immediacy which is instantaneous. When, in the Court of Justice, after he has ignored the truth of the

Oracle who proclaims Hermione's innocence, the servant reports:

Serv. The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear
Of the Queen's speed, is gone.
Leontes How? gone?
Serv. Is dead.
(III.ii.144-145)

Leontes instanteously realizes his wrong in a peripeteia-like sequence:

Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves
Do strike at my injustice.
(III.ii.147)

The other instrument of instruction—besides that of the prince's death—is Paulina who had attempted earlier to forestall the effects of Leontes' murderous rage. In Act Two, scene three, Paulina enters Leontes' chambers, carrying with her Leontes' infant daughter, and comes, she says, as "your physician," and "from your good queen." "Good queen!" mocks Leontes, and Paulina repeats:

Good queen, my lord, good queen, I say good queen,
And would by combat make her good, so were I
A man, the worst about you.
(II.iii.69-71)

In short, Paulina is anything but meek, even to the King. Like Beatrice, she would be a man in order to defend a maligned lady. Upon laying the child down at Leontes' feet, she must now face his wrath: "Out," he rails,

A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o' door!
A most intelligencying bawd!
(II.iii.68-69)

In the Arden edition, Pafford glosses "mankind" as "masculine, termagant. Cf. Beaumont and Fletcher, *Monsieur Thomas*, IV.vi.50, 'Twas a sound knock she gave me: a plaguey mankind girl'" (47). Thus does he react to a forceful woman. Paulina remains undaunted, however, and answers him with wit:

Not so:
I am as ignorant in that, as you
In so entitling me: and no less honest
Than you are mad, which is enough, I'll warrant,
As this world goes, to pass for honest.
(II.iii.68-72).

The exchange continues, with Leontes labelling her a "callet" and a "gross hag;" calling the child "bastard" and "brat," as Paulina proceeds to point out the physical resemblances between the father and child. Finally, in a fit of desperation, Leontes cries, "I'll have thee burnt!" And Paulina replies,

I care not:
It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in't. I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen
(Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hing'd fancy) something savors
Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world.
(II.iii.113-121)

This allusion to tyranny strikes a sensitive chord at last. Fearing to be called a tyrant, he changes the sentence from burning to a swift removal of the child to a remote place. To Antigonus, he commands:

We enjoin thee,
As thou art liegeman to us, that thou carry
This female bastard hence, and that thou bear it
To some remote and desert place quite out
Of our dominions, and that there thou leave it
(Without more mercy) to it own protection,
And favor of the climate.
(II.iii.173-178)

So much for leniency. But Paulina has won a victory for herself and Perdita, for without the charge of tyrant, both might have died. Thus by understanding the vanity of the man does Paulina, in effect, win the battle. One would not need a Paulina to point out the errors of Leontes' actions, so blatant are they, but her presence is significant in that it allows for the presentation of an openly defiant woman attempting to

reason with an enraged king. She is one of the rare women in Elizabethan drama who actively defies the male authority and, in the world of romance at least, is allowed to survive. Ultimately, in terms of Leontes' self-enlightenment, reluctant and limited as it may be, Paulina is the prime moving force of this play, in the restoration of good over evil.

There is, of course, another character in the play who, to use Pafford's term, exemplifies the qualities of "Resolute Womanhood"—Hermione, the wife of Leontes. Before the members of "the just and open trial," which Leontes promises his wife but is unwilling to give, Hermione echoes the words of Desdemona ("I understand a fury in your words / But not the words") when she says to Leontes accusation of her adultery, which has already been disproved by the words of the Oracle:

> Sir,
> You speak a language that I understand not.
> My life stands in the level of your dreams,
> Which I'll lay down.
> (III.ii.79-82)

Leontes characteristically plays with her words, and then condemns her:

> Your actions are my dreams.
> You had a bastard by Polinexes,
> And I but dream'd it. As you were past all shame
> (Those of your fact are so), so past all truth;
> Which to deny concerns more than avails; for as
> Thy brat hath been cast out, like to itself,
> No father owning it (which is indeed
> More criminal in thee than it), so thou
> Shalt feel our justice; in whose easiest passage
> Look for no less than death.
> (III.ii.82-91)

But Hermione shows bravery, if not defiance, in saying that she fears not death, and after listing abuses done against her, she wishes only that her honorable name be restored:

> Sir, spare your threats.
> The bug which you would fright me with, I seek.
> To me can life be no commodity;
> The crown and comfort of my life, your favor,

I do give lost, for I do feel it gone,
But know not how it went. My second joy
And first-fruits of my body, from his presence
I am barr'd, like one infectious. My third comfort
(Starr'd most unluckily) is from my breast
(The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth)
Hal'd out to murther; myself on every post
Proclaim'd a strumpet; with immodest hatred
The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs
To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried
Here to this place, i' th' open air, before
I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
That I should fear to die? Therefore proceed.
But yet hear this—mistake me not; no life
(I prize it not a straw), but for mine honor,
Which I would free—if I shall be condemn'd
Upon surmises (all proofs sleeping else
But what your jealousies awake), I tell you
'Tis rigor and not law. Your honors all,
I do refer me to the oracle:
Apollo be my judge!

(III.ii.92-116)

As Leontes calls for the message from the oracle, Hermione adds one concluding speech which lifts an emotional appeal to the level of strong assertion:

The Emperor of Russia was my father.
O that he was alive, and here beholding
His daughter's trial! that he did but see
The flatness of my misery, yet with eyes
Of pity, not revenge!

(III.ii.119-123)

It is a wish that she be recognized if not for her self and her "feminine" appeal, then by the standard of masculine rule—her line of descent is regal; her father was the Emperor of Russia. It is the only standard that the audience has known.

But there is another truth as well—that of the oracle. The officer reads the judgment:

'Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless,
Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous
tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten,
and the King shall live without an heir, if
that which is lost be not found.'

(III.ii.132-136)

Amid the otherwise unanimous cries of rejoicing, Leontes' is the sole dissenting voice: "There is no truth at all i' th' oracle / The sessions shall proceed; this is mere falsehood," he raves.

Then comes the mortal blow. The servant enters with the equivocal message.

Serv. The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear
Of the Queen's speed, is gone.
Leontes. How? gone?
Serv. Is dead.
(III.ii.144-145)

Leontes' reversal is immediate: "Apollo's angry. and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice." Only with the shock of the loss of his son, his male heir, does Leontes stop his wild fantasies. While Paulina notes Hermione's fainting with alarm, Leontes is not overly upset.

Take her hence;
Her heart is but o'erchar'd; she will recover.
I have too much believ'd mine own suspicion.
Beseech you tenderly apply to her
Some remedies for life.
(III.ii.149-152)

Leontes' complacency is, for Paulina, an inappropriate response. In an instant, it appears, she can gauge his superficial, if solicitous, response to Hermione. For Paulina, it will not do. She reappears and tells of Hermione's sudden death. In so doing, she deceives not only Leontes, but the audience. Shakespeare's reason for this deliberate deception appears two-fold. First, to teach Leontes that he has still not learned the magnitude of his wrong in not appreciating his noble wife, and two, to instruct the audience, as well, to reawaken their faith in a maligned woman. The first three acts of the play present the destruction wrought by Leontes' jealous rage and preoccupation with ego; the last two show the restoration of grace achieved principally by three feminine agents: Perdita, Paulina, and Hermione. Like Leontes, it seems to me, we are to experience the shift from a predominantly masculine allegiance to that of a feminine one, and, in the end, a resolution of the two.

We will remember that the Friar staged a similar deception in *Much Ado About Nothing*, thus allowing Claudio to mature before marrying the rejuvenated Hero. Here the longer delay is necessary both in terms of the plot—that is, in allowing Perdita or "she who is lost" to grow up—and in terms of the more serious nature of the characters. Comparing Hero to Hermione, however, is like comparing a cardboard doll to a fully realized woman. While Hermione fulfills the Patient Griselda motif, she does so with a difference. Appearing passive in the hands of Paulina, she is nevertheless capable of reasoned protests against her husband's treatment of her. Like the Duchess in Webster's play, she has a dignity and a majesty all her own. "The Emperor of Russia was my father," she cries at her trial. She is thus royal in her own right, and with her "miraculous" reappearance in the final act, she has suggestions of the divine.

If the action of the first three acts was precipitated by male jealousy and portrays a male-dominated world, the last two acts show, on the whole, the reverse, as Perdita reigns as Queen in the sheep-shearing scene, and Paulina effects the theatrical coup, which restores Hermione to the repentant Leontes. Yet even here, at least in Act Four, in a different season and a different locale, and after the passage of sixteen years, the figure of masculine authority, now in the form of King Polixenes, threatens to upset the pastoral world of Bohemia. Once more the shadow of Leontes' rage reappears in the guise of Polinexes, who flaunts his paternal rule of his son, Florizel. Once again the nobility of the woman is to be tested at the hands of the male.

Disguised as a visitor at the sheep-shearing feast where he observes the betrothal of Florizel to Perdita, Polixenes interrupts the joining of hands by asking his son, "Have you a father?" When Florizel answers, "I have; but what of him?" Polixenes cautions his son to observe the power of parental authority, as he says:

> Methinks a father
> Is at the nuptial of his son a guest
> That best becomes the table. Pray you once more,
> Is not your father grown incapable

Of reasonable affairs? is he not stupid
With age and alt'ring rheums? Can he speak? hear?
Know man from man? dispute his own estate?
Lies he not bed-rid? and again does nothing
But what he did being childish?
(IV.iv.394-402)

When Florizel answers that his father "has his health, and ampler strength indeed / Than most have of his age," but "for some other reasons" wishes the betrothal to remain secret for a time, Polixenes grows increasingly enraged and reveals himself as Florizel's father:

Mark your divorce, young sir,
Whom son I dare not call. Thou art too base
To be (acknowledg'd). Thou, a sceptre's heir,
That thus affects a sheep-hook!
(IV.iv.417-420)

Here Polixenes is upholding the Elizabethan adherence to degree, which he believes his son to be violating in choosing a shepherd's daughter for his wife. The dramatic irony, of course, is that she, like Florizel, is of royal blood, but unlike Florizel, her royalty must be tested and must outshine her country clothes. Shakespeare is working with the familiar appearance and reality theme, as well as the conflict between parental authority and the individual choice of a husband or wife. Obviously, Polixenes is blind to Perdita's superior quality, and he rails:

Thou, fresh piece
Of excellent witchcraft, who, of force, must know
The royal fool thou cop'st with—
I'll have thy beauty scratch'd with briers and made
More homely than thy state. . . . If ever henceforth thou
These rural latches to his entrance open,
Or hoop his body more with thy embraces,
I will devise a death as cruel for thee
As thou art tender to 't.
(IV.iv.422-426;437-441)

In Polixenes' present rage, a duplication of Leontes' is intended. Unaware of her royal birth, Perdita is submissive,

and yet a glimmer of a plea for equality is found when she says:

> Even here, undone!
> I was not much afeard; for once or twice
> I was about to speak, and tell him plainly
> The self-same sun that shines upon his court
> Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
> Looks on alike. Will't please you, sir, be gone?
> I told you what would come of this. Beseech you
> Of your own state take care. This dream of mine
> Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,
> But milk my ewes, and weep.
> (IV.iv.442-449)

Here, for differing reasons, Perdita must suffer because she is a woman as did her mother Hermione; the first because of supposed low degree, the second because of supposed adultery. Both claims are erroneous and it appears that one of the important purposes of the play is to restore rightful respect to both women. Unlike Leontes, Florizel's trust in Perdita is unshaken, however, and he plans with Camillo to leave with Perdita for Sicilia, thus unconsciously preparing for the reunion of Perdita with her father and her lost homeland. His faithfulness to Perdita restores the order that Leontes' distrust had broken.

Act Five opens in Leontes' palace, as did the significant confrontation between Leontes and Polixenes in the First Act—with his counsellors encouraging him to marry for the sake of the kingdom, but Paulina is there to prevent such an event, and to kindle the memories of his past mistakes, as well as the virtues of Hermione. She also serves to remind all of the oracle's prophecy: if that which is lost be not found, there will be no heir. As Leontes promises to marry none but Paulina's choice, she enigmatically pronounces, "That shall be when your first queen's again in breath: Never till then."

A servant enters to announce Prince Florizel and his Princess, whom he describes as . . . "a woman / More worth than any man; men, that she is / The rarest of all women." Then two Gentlemen relate the strange reunion of Leontes and Perdita indirectly, allowing the final reunion of Leontes

and Hermione to be the climactic moment of the play. For what Shakespeare sets out to do in scene three is to present the indescribable: the reunion between Leontes and the restored Hermione. In her house and among the assemblage, Paulina commands attention as she presents the "statue" of Hermione:

> As she liv'd peerless,
> So her dead likeness, I do well believe,
> Excells what ever you look'd upon,
> Or hand of man hath done; therefore I keep it
> (Lonely), apart. But here it is; prepare
> To see the life as lively mock'd as ever
> Still sleep mock'd death. Behold, and say 'tis well.
> (*Paulina draws a curtain, and discovers) Hermione (standing) like a statue.* (V.iii.14-20)

She whom he had previously cursed as "a mankind witch!" "a most intelligencying bawd!" is now the instrument of Leontes' "recreation," as well as that of Hermione, who had, as we have seen, been similarly abused. It is as if Shakespeare allows a feminine version of Saint Paul to prevail at last when, to all assembled, Paulina speaks:

> It is requir'd
> You do awake your faith. Then, all stand still.
> (V.iii.94-95)

The "witch" it appears has powers of the divine, as with the sound of music, Hermione descends, and Leontes exclaims:

> O, she's warm!
> If this be magic, let it be an art
> Lawful as eating.

The climactic reunion between husband and wife quite appropriately is understated with silences, rather than words, for the experience transcends the limitations of language, however lofty. Instead, Paulina tells us simply that "She embraces him." And yet one speech is retained for Hermione; it is her only speech:

> Ye gods, look down
> And from your sacred vials pour your graces
> Upon my daughter's head! Tell me, mine own,

Where hast thou been preserv'd? where liv'd? how found.
Thy father's court? for thou shalt hear that I,
Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserv'd
Myself to see the issue.
(V.iii.122-128)

In this late play women are the redeemers not only of each other, but of misguided men as well. And although Leontes has the last word, as in his concluding speech to Hermione and Paulina, he says:

Good Paulina,
lead us from hence, where we may leisurely
Each one demand, and answer to his part
Perform'd in this wide gap of time, since first
We were dissever'd. Hastily lead away.
(V.iii.151-155)

It is Paulina who leads the way, and who has initiated the action of the last act of the play. Thus, in one of his last plays, Shakespeare has portrayed the triumph not only of time, but of resolute women. In exposing the male ego, he has unveiled the majesty of those who have suffered under its onslaught, and who have not only endured, but prevailed.

In presenting Hermione as descending from the pedestal with the aid of Paulina, Shakespeare leaves us with a fascinating, yet natural image: that woman or wife is neither the slandered "thing" that Leontes would have her be in Act One, nor a coldly idealized statue as she first appears in Act Five. Rather, she is "warm"; she is human. Behind the paradox of the living statue is the situation which four hundred years later women still face: behind the assigned roles and masculine preconceptions, woman is first of all a human being.

If Paulina could actively defy the tyrannous authority of Leontes and weather the anti-feminist diatribe directed at her as she presents the Sicilian king with his daughter, and if Hermione could pass from a Patient Griselda to a Virgin Mary, capable of transcendence and grace, the question arises as to what to do with a commanding figure such as the Duchess in John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*, believed to have been written one to three years after *The Winter's Tale*.[3]

For if Shakespeare's play, which is labelled a late romance, could save Hermione from death (unlike the source, Greene's *Triumph of Time*, in which the Hermione figure dies and Leontes ends by committing suicide), a more troubling presentation of the fate of the individualistic woman is presented in *The Duchess*, suggesting that there is no clear-cut progression of the individual woman in Elizabethan drama, only that an underlying questioning of the male role, when carried to extremes, can be said to have taken place. In his introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'The Duchess of Malfi'*, Norman Rabkin describes the difference this way:

> One phenomenon in which we recognize the new loss of faith in the old order is the growing conviction of such tragic dramatists as remained in pre-revolutionary England that the heroic virtue of the individual celebrated in Elizabethan tragedy is no longer relevant. Increasingly tragedy presents helpless men whose heroism is ironically qualified by the contexts in which they live. Othello and Lear are the victims of gigantic conspiracies as well as of themselves; but Macbeth and Antony and Coriolanus, more strikingly, are ruined in large part by women. And Webster inaugurates a new fashion (perhaps abetted by Fletcher): he signifies the final helplessness of his tragic protagonists by making them women. The pattern will continue in the best tragedies of the period until the theatres close at the outbreak of the war. The emergence of 'she-tragedy' is as clear a sign of the passing of a system of values as the disappearance of Renaissance tragedy.[4]

In this statement Professor Rabkin introduces some interesting assumptions—among them, the negative influence of women in relation to Macbeth, Antony, and Coriolanus. What he seems to overlook is that most of Shakespeare's women are constructive, rather than destructive influences. But more important than these specific examples, which may be debated for their representation of destructive women in the later plays (of which Hermione is an obvious exception, as well as Imogen, Marina, Thasis, and Miranda) is the underlying assumption that women are weaker than men: "he signifies the final helplessness of his tragic protagonists by making them women." The assumption here, it seems to me, is that heroes are categorically men, not women; that, as in the traditional thought of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,

woman was the weaker sex; and, for him, women cannot attain tragic dignity.

If, in considering *The Duchess of Malfi*, one interprets Rabkin's phrase "the final helplessness" in terms of traditional power or control over the lives of others, he is right, for, in spite of the Duchess's furtive attempt to choose her own destiny, she is dominated and destroyed by her brothers' vindictiveness, especially that of Ferdinand. If, however, one interprets the term "the final helplessness" in terms of moral or dramatic strength, I believe the description to be invalid, for in spite of her initial wilfulness, the Duchess is far stronger morally than either of her brothers, or Antonio—indeed any other character in the play. Thus, while "helpless" in the Machiavellian hands of her brothers, the Duchess is heroically strong as she pits her vision against their depravity.

Rabkin's concluding sentence that "the emergence of 'she-tragedy' is as clear a sign of the passing of a system of values as the disappearance of Renaissance tragedy" suggests a passing sneer at this lesser form. While agreeing that the 'she-tragedy' may well be an index to "the passing of a system of values," I do not agree with the underlying assumption that the woman protagonist in Jacobean tragedy shows a lesser kind of heroism; rather I think that strong women characters such as the Duchess were necessary in order to expose the pattern of male domination which these plays repeatedly present. If, in philosophical terms, the glory of the Renaissance was dying and the value system to which Rabkin refers lacked social cohesion, thé diminishing of optimism and opportunity for greatness, that is one thing. If, however, the "passing . . . system of values" was male egotism and tyranny, I think that Shakespeare and Webster both saw that it had to end.

As Shakespeare changed his source in *The Winter's Tale*, so did Webster change his. In tracing Webster's source from Bandello to Belleforest to Painter, F. L. Lucas wryly remarks:

> From Bandello the tale passed to Belleforest, in whose second volume of *Histoires tragiques* it forms the first story. Belleforest is a pedant and a prig. His characters all talk like great whales and their interminable speeches and soliloquies make even the Duchess's story dull; while the

> author's high moral tone compels him to pelt his unhappy heroine with a volley of references to Semiramis, Messalina, Faustina, even Pasiphaë, in order to express his disgust at her shameless behavior in marrying a man she loved. 'Shall I be of opinion that a homeless servaunt oughte to sollicite, nay rather suborne the Daughter of his Lorde without punishment, or that a vyle and abject person dare to mount upon a Prynces Bed?' (Painter's translation.) At the execrable impiety of the pretended pilgrimage to Loretto, his voice rises to a scream: 'and yet you see this great and mighty Duchesse trot and run after the male, like a female Wolfe or Lionesse, (when they goe to sault) and forget the noble bloud of Aragon whereof she was descended, to couple hir self almost with the simplest person of the trimmest Gentlemen of Naples.' Bandello is no Boccaccio: but he belongs to a different stage of civilization from Belleforest. The Frenchman, sermons and all, was translated by William Painter in his *Palace of Pleasure* (1566-7:11.23) during a varied career which ranged from the headmastership of Sevenoaks School to some highly successful embezzlement as clerk of Her Majesty's Ordnance. And so through the hands of a gentleman, a fool, and a knave the tale reached Webster.[5]

Perhaps no more dismaying and pietistic spokesman for the rigidity of the masculine code can be found than William Painter. Upon the discovery of her marriage, he portrays the sexually obsessed Ferdinand as sympathetic, the Duchess as damnable:

> These newes reported to the Cardinal and his brother, it may be coniectured how grieuously they toke them, and for that they were not able to digest them with modestie, the yongest of the brethren, yelled forth a thousand curses and despites, against the simple sexe of womankind. 'Ha (said the Prince, transported with choler, and driuen in the deadly furie,) what law is able to punish or restrain the foolish indiscretion of a woman, that yeldeth hir self to hir own desires? What shame is able to bridle and withdrawe hir from hir minde and madnesse? Or with what feare is it possible to snaffle them from execution of their filthinesse? There is no beast be he neuer so wilde, but man sometime may tame, and bring to his lure and order. The force and diligence of man is able to make milde the strong and proud, and to overtake the swiftest beast and foule, or otherwise to attaine the highest and deepest things of the world: but this incarnate diuelish beast the woman, no force can surmount hir, no swiftnesse can approache hir mobilitie, no good mind can preuent hir sleights and deceites, they seeme to be procreated and borne against all order of nature, and to liue without law, which gouerneth all other things indued with some reason and understanding.[6]

Such invective against women, here in novelistic form, might well have been lifted from one of the anti-feminist tracts

of the period such a Stephen Gosson's *Quippes for Vpstart New-fangled Gentlewomen* or Joseph Swetnam's *The Araignment of lewd, idle, Froward, and unconstant women.* And although Painter does, at long last, point out the iniquities of the two brothers, the climactic and concluding moral is that man (or woman) should not upset degree, as Antonio has done in marrying a woman of superior station.[7]

The critical question, however, is what did Webster make of his principal source? Why did he change the conception of the Duchess and alter William Painter's novel to make her the most sympathetic character in his play forty-five years later? What events, both historical and dramatic, would allow for this shift of sympathy for the Duchess in Webster's play, so that she ends as a figure of tragic dimensions, rather than as the pathetic, once wanton, one of Painter?

Although Rabkin envisions the change as the loss of faith in the ordered and resplendent world of the Renaissance and postulates that Webster shows this helplessness by making his tragic protagonists women, I suggest that the shift from a weak and passive woman to a strong, even openly defiant one, had been evolving in Shakespeare's plays, as in the comedies of *As You Like It, Twelfth Night*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, and in the tragedy of *King Lear*, and the romance, *The Winter's Tale.* By presenting women who increasingly defy the masculine code, Shakespeare may have provided a model of strong women. Also, in the model of Elizabeth I, now but ten years dead, Webster may well be remembering the strength of feminine authority. Norman Rabkin, who had decried the appearance of women characters as a mark of the end of a system of values, must attest to her strength when he says that "the world of *The Duchess of Malfi* is a world of authority figures driven by compulsions they scarcely sense themselves, in which a Bosola's awareness of the moral implications of his own actions has no binding power on that action and the imagery underlines the plot's insistence that abnormality is the norm. It is a world of utter depravity wearing the mask of ordered society, of universal hypocrisy on a tragic level such as Ben Jonson had portrayed on the comic. And into this world Webster

brings his Duchess, a gallant woman brave enough to love as she thinks right."[8]

And in *The Moral Vision of 'The Duchess of Malfi'*, Robert Ornstein hits Webster's conception of the Duchess on the mark when he notes:

> Webster's search for a nobility that rises above enslaving circumstances, unsatisfied in the glorious villains of 'The White Devil', is consummated in his portrait of a fragile, tormented young woman kneeling before her murderers. Only he among the Jacobeans dared to find a tragic heroism in a vain, willful girl, who until her dying moments is careless of her name and blind to the responsibilities which accompany prerogative. In temperament she is a heroine of Shakespearean romantic comedy, graceful, witty, wanton and innocent at the same time, who woos and wins her husband in spite of himself. She capriciously ignores the challenge of an aristocratic life, but the challenge of death—the supreme challenge in Jacobean tragedy—she accepts boldly and triumphantly. . . . For the Duchess no gesture of defiance is needed to obliterate the terror of death. It is against the attempt to despoil her humanity that she flings her celebrated assertion of individuality, 'I am Duchesse of Malfi still.'[9]

Webster's more complex and sympathetic characterization of the Duchess represents a triumph of woman as individual in English Renaissance Drama, for it is she who holds the center of the stage, she who defies the dictates of her possessive brothers by marrying the man of her choice, and she who achieves tragic stature in her acceptance of death. Although some critics disagree in their assessment of her (Clifford Leech, for example, says that "the more we consider the Duchess, the more hints of guilt seem to appear"), John Russell Brown maintains that such disagreement is inevitable, for "the main source offers conflicting judgements" and "from the beginning of 'The Duchess' the audience is taught to look for contradictions."[10]

To determine the validity of Webster's sympathetic portrayal of the Duchess, one must return to the dynamics of the play itself. In Act One, scene one, an initial contrast in the characters of the Arragonian brothers and the Duchess is given when Antonio says of Ferdinand—"a most perverse and turbulent nature" and of the Cardinal "a melancholy church-

man." He then presents an idealized description of the Duchess:

> But for their sister, the right noble duchess—
> You never fix'd your eye on three fair medals,
> Cast in one figure of so different temper:
> For her discourse, it is so full of rapture
> You only will begin then to be sorry
> When she doth end her speech; and wish, in wonder,
> She held it less vain-glory to talk much,
> Than you penance to hear her: whilst she speaks,
> She throws upon a man so sweet a look,
> That it were able to raise one to a galliard
> That lay in a dead palsy, and to dote
> On that sweet countenance: but in that look,
> There speaketh so divine a continence
> As cuts off all lascivious, and vain hope.
> Her days are practis'd in such a noble virtue
> That sure her nights—nay more, her very sleeps—
> Are more in heaven than other ladies' shrifts.
> Let all sweet ladies break their flatt'ring glasses,
> And dress themselves in her.[11]
> (I.i.187-204)

Webster then presents the characters in action. In Ferdinand's exchange with Bosola, in which Bosola agrees to be an intelligencer for the Duke, Ferdinand reveals his "perverse nature" by outlining Bosola's duties:

> —I give you that
> To live i' th' court, here; and observe the duchess,
> To note all the particulars of her 'havior;
> What suitors do solicit her for marriage
> And whom she best affects: she's a young widow—
> I would not have her marry again.
> (I.i.251-256)

When Bosola inquires, "No, sir?" Ferdinand refuses to discuss his motives, replying: "Do not ask the reason: but be satisfied, / I say I would not." Much has been made by critics of Ferdinand's subterranean motivation, which, for now, one can only guess at. Indeed, apart from the obvious motive of masculine control, and in light of subsequent developments, it is not clear whether or not Ferdinand understands the reason for his actions. Later we shall see that Ferdinand, like Hamlet,

Othello, Frankford, and Leontes, adopts the role of divine punisher, but Ferdinand carries it to grotesque extremes. As terrible as Hamlet's and Othello's and Leontes' ravings against women appear, they are mere child's play when compared to Ferdinand's. And while Antonio's word "perverse" in initially describing Ferdinand may suffice; "maniacal" comes closer to describing his actions.

After the interview between Ferdinand and Bosola, the Duchess is interrogated by Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Here the brothers condemn any thought of her remarriage:

Ferd. You are a widow:
You know already what man is; and therefore
Let not youth, high promotion, eloquence—
Card. No, nor anything without the addition, honour,
Sway your high blood.
Ferd. Marry! they are most luxurious
Will wed twice.
Their livers are more spotted
Than Laban's sheep.
(I.i.293-298)

When the Duchess speaks, her response is surprisingly witty; Antonio had not mentioned her wit in his idealized, initial image of her. "Diamonds are of most value, they say," she rejoins, "that have pass'd through most jewellers' hands." But Ferdinand wastes no time in checkmating her when he shifts her clever remarks to base retort: "Whores, by the rule, are precious;—"

With this, the Duchess appears to capitulate. "Will you hear me? I'll never marry." But the brothers proceed undaunted, the Cardinal voicing an anti-feminist stereotype; Ferdinand a harrowing challenge:

Card. So most widows say:
But commonly that motion lasts no longer
Than the turning of an hour-glass—the funeral sermon
And it, end both together.
Ferd. Hypocrisy is woven of a fine small thread,
Subtler than Vulcan's engine: yet, believe't,
Your darkest actions—nay, your privat'st thoughts—
Will come to light.
(I.i.301-305;313-316)

What the brothers want is no less than absolute control over their sister's life. It is the most explicit statement yet encountered to enslave the woman by masculine domination. Further, Ferdinand reveals the first of many hints of his sexual obsession when, with rather obvious *double entendres,* he concludes:

> You are my sister—
> This was my father's poniard: do you see?
> I'd be loth to see 't look rusty, 'cause 'twas his:—
> I would have you to give o'er these chargeable revels;
> A visor and a mask are whispering-rooms
> That were n'er built for goodness: fare ye well:—
> And women like that part which, like the lamprey,
> Hath ne'er a bone in't.
> (I.i.330-337)

The father's and brother's control meet in the image of the poniard—steelly domination; the lamprey, an eel-like fish, has obvious sexual implications. When the Duchess recoils with, "Fie sir!" Ferdinand restates the quibble for punning effect:

> Nay,
> I mean the tongue: variety of courtship;—
> What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale
> Make a woman believe? Farewell, lusty widow.
> (I.i.338-340)

In Ferdinand we find a mind both fascinated and repelled by sex; a man who reduces talk of marriage and courtship to the level of a smirking dirty joke; a man who intends to control not only the actions, but the thoughts of his sister; a man who reaches the outer limits of depravity in upholding the dubious distinction of his aristocratic blood-line. In him we find the tenets of the masculine code grown monstrous: a control of the other, the woman, which grows cancerous in its conclusion.

But the Duchess is no Patient Griselda. As her brothers leave, she weighs the dangers and decides in favor of action, rather than of submission. "Shall this move me?" she begins,

> If all my royal kindred
> Lay in my way unto this marriage,

> I'd make them my low footsteps; and even now,
> Even in this hate, as men in some great battles,
> By apprehending danger, have achiev'd
> Almost impossible actions—I have heard soldiers say so—
> So I, through frights, and threat'nings, will assay
> This dangerous venture: let old wives report
> I wink'd and chose a husband.
> (I.i.341-349)

Here the Duchess shows a flagrant disregard for her noble blood and her "royal kindred" even to the point of making them her "low footsteps" in her determination to remarry. She wills herself to action, much as, she imagines, a heroic soldier might. But the speech also reveals that, in promising her brothers not to remarry only a few lines before, she has told a deliberate lie. Where now is the paragon of women whom Antonio had eulogized for her virtue? To whom do we owe sympathy—to the brothers who adamantly advocate that she leave her noble blood untainted, or to the Duchess who defies this decree? The question is complex and troubling and no easy answer appears at this point in the play.

Further, in the following scene we find an inversion of social order in which the Duchess is forced, she says, to take the initiative and woo Antonio. According to James Calderwood in "'The Duchess of Malfi': Styles of Ceremony," her wooing represents an attempt to clothe her private impulse with a ceremonial covering. For him,

> The Duchess conducts her courtship of Antonio as a staged ceremony which is in effect a casting off of the essential values represented in ceremony. As a depersonalized, formalized expression of belief and emotion, ceremony is necessarily in the service of supra-individual interests, and its participants make at least a gesture of endorsing those interests by voluntarily restricting the free play of private emotion to the symbolic pattern prescribed by the ceremonial role. Although ceremony and ritual are by no means prohibitive of individual expression—but merely impose a form upon the content of private experience—they are confirmations of order, of an order that exists to some extent regardless of the individual, even if the individual is a Duchess. Indeed, as Antonio's first speech in the play implies, it is precisely because the individual here is a Duchess—the political and moral exemplar who, if corrupt, causes 'Death, and diseases through the whole land'—that her conduct has serious and even tragic implications. For what the Duchess is engaging in here is not properly ceremony but

> ceremony-in-reverse, a form of deceremonialization by which she divests herself of the responsibilities of her social role.[12]

What Calderwood says here is important in assessing the actions of the Duchess as she sets out to make her own choices in defiance of her brothers' orders. In inverting the ceremonial role, she is striking at a sensitive chord in Elizabethan thought—the preservation of social order. However, in still clinging to the remnants of ceremony she reveals, I think, a deep-seated reverence for social form which she cannot entirely discard, much as a once religious agnostic remains ambivalent about the church. Moreover, the Duchess does not welcome her role as initiator in the wooing scene—

> The misery of us that are born great—
> We are forc'd to woo, because none dare woo us:
> And as a tyrant doubles with his words,
> And fearfully equivocates, so we
> Are forc'd to express our violent passions
> In riddles, and in dreams, and leave the path
> Of simple virtue, which was never made
> To seem the thing it is not.
> (I.i.441-448)

Twice she says that she has been "forced" into the role of wooer, and before meeting Antonio she tells her servant Cariola:

> . . . . I am going into a wilderness,
> Where I shall find nor path, nor friendly clew
> To be my guide.
> (I.i.359-361)

Her parody or reversal of the ceremonial role in the wooing scene is not so much a choice as a consequence of the defiance of her brothers orders. And this, as J. R. Mulryne states in "'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfi'" *Jacobean Theatre* I (London: Arnold, 1960), 220, is the crucial departure.

> When the Duchess chooses to defy her brothers' world her choice inescapably involves an element of deceit or at best evasion. We of course fully sympathize with her decision to reject the over-fluent and over-insistent exhortations of the Cardinal and Ferdinand against remarriage. But she is forced to tell them a deliberate lie, and from that

moment on her relationship with the world beyond her own small circle is one of uneasy watchfulness.

And this is the pivotal problem of women in English Renaissance Drama—whether to actively defy the dictates of the masculine code or to passively accept them. In the plays we have seen thus far, all women who assert themselves, with the exception of Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* and the heroines of the comedies, are destroyed. The Duchess will be no exception; indeed, she represents the archetype of an individual woman who is most flagrantly assaulted by the act of revenge inherent in the code. In asserting her choice to remarry, she can only defy her brothers and thus be destroyed. But in the process—and this is the crucial point—she demonstrates a nobility superior to that of any other character in the play. Caught in the psychological double-bind where choice is equated with no choice but defiance, she allows for a reconsideration of her brothers' authority which would pose remarriage as a worse offense than murder, evasion more reprehensible than jealous, sexually obsessed wrath. Given the infected world of the Cardinal and Ferdinand, the Duchess is forced into subterranean actions and subterfuges which we assume she normally would not choose.

When, after the secret marriage between Antonio and the Duchess, Cariola can conclude the First Act with the words:

> Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman
> Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows
> A fearful madness: I owe her much of pity.
> (I.i.504-506)

the question of how the audience is to view the actions of the Duchess is still unresolved—in Cariola's eyes the spirit of "greatness" and "of woman" are mutually exclusive. But at the end of Act Four, with the Duchess's death, they are fused. Thus while Cariola initially describes her mistress's mood with the label "a fearful madness," Webster is, in contrast, creating before our eyes the picture of a true madman: Ferdinand. And for him, it would seem, that greatness in woman is not only a possibility, but a reality in the figure of the Duchess.

For a study of real madness, we must turn to the delineation of Ferdinand as he learns of the birth of his sister's son. Ferdinand's first response is oblique. "I have this night digg'd up a mandrake," he begins, "And I am grown mad with 't." In his admission that he has "grown mad" with the news, one asks the reason for what appears to be an overreaction. In a footnote to this speech John Russell Brown comments in his edition of the play that

> Ferdinand's reaction to the news of the birth of his sister's son is not due wholly to thwarted political intrigue as he says later (cf. IV.ii.281-5 'I had a hope, Had she continu'd widow, to have gain'd / An infinite mass of treasure by her death:'), or to outraged honour and pride of family as he implied in Act I; the cry shows, at the beginning of this crucial scene, which is the climax of Act II, that his reaction involves, in some fantastic way, horror, violence, and sex. (63)

From this point to the end of Act II, Ferdinand explodes with a kind of sexually obsessed fury; he raves like a madman. The epithets against his sister follow:

> Read there—a sister damn'd; she's loose i'th'hilts:
> Grown a notorious strumpet.
> —O confusion seize her!
> She hath had most cunning bawds to serve her turn,
> And more secure conveyances for lust
> Than towns of garrison for service.
> (II.v.3; 8-11)

The sexual images then turn murderous:

> Rhubarb, O for rhubarb
> To purge this choler! here's the cursed day
> To prompt my memory, and here 't shall stick
> Till of her bleeding heart I make a sponge
> To wipe it out.
> (II.v.12-16)

Then the Cardinal asks,

> Shall our blood,
> The royal blood of Arragon and Castilo,
> Be thus attainted?

Ferdinand's reply is frenzied. An indication that he now views himself as a kind of physician-priest who must cleanse the infected blood of his sister is clear from his words:

> Apply desperate physic:
> We must not now use balsamum, but fire,
> The smarting cupping-glass, for that's the mean
> To purge infected blood, such blood as hers:—
> There is a kind of pity in mine eye,
> I'll give it to my handkercher; and now 'tis here,
> I'll bequeath this to her bastard. . . .
> To make soft lint for his mother's wounds,
> When I have hew'd her to pieces.
> (II.v.23-31)

After this violent diatribe, which recalls Othello's cry, "Cuckold me. I'll hew her into messes!" the brothers adopt a generalized anti-feminist stance:

> *Card.* Curs'd creature!
> Unequal nature, to place women's hearts
> So far upon the left side!
>
> *Ferd.* Foolish men,
> That e'er will trust their honour in a bark
> Made of so slight, weak bulrush as is woman,
> Apt every minute to sink it!
> (II.v.32-36)

Suddenly Ferdinand's own increasingly bestial nature is reflected in his strange imagining:

> Methinks I see her laughing—
> Excellent hyena!—talk to me somewhat, quickly,
> Or my imagination will carry me
> To see her, in the shameful act of sin.

When the cooler Cardinal asks, "With whom?" Ferdinand, voyeur-like, imagines more:

> Happily with some strong thigh'd bargeman;
> Or one o'th' wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge,
> Or toss the bar, or else some lovely squire
> That carries coals up to her privy lodgings.
> (II.v.38-41; 42-45)

The Cardinal tries to still his sexually obsessed brother with "You fly beyond your reason," but Ferdinand's fascination is fired even more. "Go to, mistress!" he exclaims. "'Tis not your whore's milk that shall quench my wild-fire, / But your whore's blood."

When the Cardinal lectures against wrath, for the first time Ferdinand admits that he, too, is involved in the Duchess's "sin," as he plots the next step in his revenge:

> So: I will only study to seem
> The thing I am not. I could kill her now,
> In you, or in myself, for I do think
> It is some sin in us, heaven doth revenge
> By her.
>
> (II.v.62-66)

But the Cardinal likes this comment even less, and cries, "Are you stark mad?" while Ferdinand relishes another sadistic delight, much as Hamlet does when, finding Claudius at prayer, he prefers a fitter time to kill the king. So Ferdinand

> . . . would have their bodies
> Burnt in a coal-pit, with the ventage stopp'd,
> That their curs'd smoke might not ascend to heaven:
> Or dip the sheets they lie in, in pitch or sulphur,
> Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match;
> Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis,
> And give 't his lecherous father, to renew
> The sin of his back.
>
> (II.v.68-73)

Ferdinand's last prophecy—

> I'll go sleep—
> Till I know who leaps my sister, I'll not stir:
> That known, I'll find scorpions to string my whips,
> And fix her in a general eclipse.
>
> (II.v.76-79)

ends his violent tirade with a curse. This speech, remarkable for its use of sibilant sounds and sinister imagery, stands, I think, as equal in psychological insight and artistry to similar scenes in Shakespeare in which a male character erupts into

jealous rage. Here, however, the motivation is further complicated by what appears to be an incestuous impulse which drives Ferdinand to jealous fury. In the events which follow in Acts Three and Four, culminating in the strangulation of the Duchess, we trace the continuing disruption of a man's mind.

In light of these events, Cariola's description of the Duchess's actions as being those of "a fearful madness" appear but the prelude, or more precisely, the counterpoint, to what is real madness in the figure of Ferdinand. Calderwood makes the distinction between the actions of the Duchess and those of Ferdinand when he says:

> The parallel with the Duchess is obvious: both have become threats to society by departing from communal patterns of ordered behavior, by representing the chaos of uninhibited private action. But the parallel ends there. Ferdinand has not deliberately violated Degree in order to release passion; indeed, his very lack of deliberation, the spontaneity of his giving way to emotion, has released to the surface a deformity of man's nature. Although both of them enter a "wilderness," the Duchess seeks to establish private order and public disorder, to forge a circumference of harmony in the center of discord. Secure of self, conscious of her own identity, she conceives of "wilderness" as being purely external. But Ferdinand blunders into a chaos within himself. Nearly losing complete control of himself, he discovers a self he would prefer to lose. Ultimately he does lose himself all ways, in madness: and ultimately the Duchess retains her self, even triumphantly reasserts her identity despite all Ferdinand can do to destroy her.[13]

Aware of Ferdinand's plot to find out the identity of her husband, the Duchess in Act Three might be seen as growing in the knowledge of her death, which, in spite of her religious pilgrimage, is sure to follow. After a playful exchange with Antonio in scene two, she turns and unexpectedly faces Ferdinand, but meets him nevertheless with a regal bearing:

> 'Tis welcome:
> For know, whether I am doom'd to live or die
> I can do both like a prince.
> (III.ii.69-71)

When Ferdinand instructs her of the loss of her reputation by way of an old fable, she retorts,

Why should only I,
Of all the other princes of the world,
Be cas'd up, like a holy relic? I have youth,
And a little beauty.
(III.ii.137-139)

And Ferdinand replies:

So you have some virgins
That are witches:—I will never see thee more.
(III.ii.140-141)

In his introduction to the play, John Russell Brown remarks that Ferdinand's relentless harping on witchcraft "has become a synonym for the power of sex: Ferdinand's rage seems motivated by it and he is fascinated by it; women are said to minister to it; Ferdinand says it is in the veins of the duchess" (xliv). Yet in spite of—or because of—Ferdinand's increased persecution of her, served now by his instrument of torture, Bosola, the Duchess appears to grow in stature. When, for example, in Act Three, scene five, as Bosola and a guard enter with visards, the Duchess reiterates her acceptance of her fate, repeating the word "welcome":

O, they are very welcome:
When Fortune's wheel is overcharg'd with princes,
The weight makes it move swift. I would have my ruin
Be sudden:
(III.v.95-98)

A startling transformation appears to have taken place at this point in the play, for while defying the male representative of the masculine code, here Ferdinand, the Duchess accepts with submission the forces of the larger cosmic world, which she visualizes as "Fortune's wheel." At this instant something important has occurred: Webster has allowed us to see man not as god, but as weak and fallible. More important, he has allowed a woman character to make a sharp distinction between man and fate or fortune's wheel in that the laws of the first are open to question; those of the second to acceptance.

In contrast to her acceptance of Fortune's wheel is her defiance of the world which her brothers have created for her.

Speaking of her children to Bosola, she angrily cries, "But I intend, since they were born accurs'd, / Curses shall be their first language." (III.v.115-116). When Bosola advises her to "Forget this base, low fellow"—her husband, Antonio—she echoes the wish of Beatrice and Paulina in wanting to be of the masculine sex, so that she could fight on equal footing. "Were I a man," she retorts, "I'd beat that counterfeit face into thy other" (III.v.118-119).

Caught in the double-bind of being both a woman and a Duchess and controlled by the diabolical power of her brothers, she presents a paradoxical picture of both acceptance and defiance of her fate. Although her situation shows a helplessness which Rabkin believes to mark the end of Renaissance tragedy, her individual defiance shows a nobility which emerges out of an intolerable situation. When Ferdinand asks in the opening speech of Act Four, "How doth our sister duchess bear herself / In her imprisonment?" even the cynical Bosola is forced to reply:

> Nobly; I'll describe her:
> She's sad, as one long us'd to 't; and she seems
> Rather to welcome the end of misery
> Than shun it:—a behaviour so noble
> As gives a majesty to adversity;
> You may discern the shape of loveliness
> More perfect in her tears, than in her smiles;
> She will muse four hours together, and her silence,
> Methinks, expresseth more than if she spake.
> (IV.i.3-11)

In the subsequent interview between Ferdinand and the Duchess, which takes place in a darkened room, the Duchess continues to assert herself in the face of ever increasing verbal and psychological abuse. When Ferdinand ironically asks, "Where are your cubs?" he reveals a mind beginning on its downward spiral to lycanthropy. When the Duchess asks, "Whom?" and Ferdinand restates,

> Call them your children;
> For though our national law distinguish bastards
> From true legitimate issue, compassionate nature
> Makes them all equal.
> (IV.i.35-37)

the Duchess challenges his smear on her marriage:

> Do you visit me for this?
> You violate a sacrament o'th' church
> Shall make you howl in hell for't.
> (IV.i.38-39)

The bestowing of the dead man's hand on the Duchess and the grotesque wax figures of Antonio and her children are the beginning of a sadistic mental torture which Ferdinand inflicts upon her. But in spite of such outrages, the Duchess stands as an image of the devoted wife, rather than the wanton Ferdinand would have her seem. Upon viewing the figures which she believes to be real, she asks Bosola for one wish—

> If they would bind me to that lifeless trunk,
> And let me freeze to death.
> (IV.i.68)

The allusion to Portia, who committed suicide out of devotion for Brutus, adds to the wifely image:

> Portia, I'll new-kindle thy coals again,
> And revive the rare and almost dead example
> Of a loving wife.
> (IV.i.72-73)

And although a devoted wife, she is not a helpless, passive creature. "I could curse the stars," she cries. When Bosola counters with the famous line, "Look you, the stars shine still:—" his plea for her recognition of her own insignificance is not wholly successful. She ends the exchange with the wish to die—"Go howl them this: and say I long to bleed:"—but the belief in herself is still undaunted. When the madmen are brought in to fulfill Ferdinand's order "To bring her to despair," she welcomes them with the same stoic calm that she welcomes death. "Sit Cariola: let them loose when you please, / For I am chain'd to endure all your tyranny," she says.

According to Inga-Stina Ekeblad, the introduction of the madmen makes a kind of anti-masque to the unequal marriage of Antonio and the Duchess; it is, in short, an anti-epithalamion.[14] Her discussion is illuminating, but more obvious to

me are the anti-feminist refrains which are threaded throughout the speeches. The second madman, for example, compares a blown glass to a woman's pregnant belly; the third continues the theme: "I will lie with every woman in my parish the tenth night: I will tythe them over, like hay-cocks." And the fourth madman laments, "Shall the pothecary outgo me, because I am a cuckold?" Thus the madmen reflect Ferdinand's and the Cardinal's sexually obsessed and anti-feminist predilections.

When, in an attempt at self-definition, the Duchess asks Bosola, "Who am I?" he defines her as

> a box of worm-seed, at best, but a salvatory of green mummy:—what's this flesh? a little crudded milk, fantastical puff-paste; our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in; more contemptible, since ours is to preserve earth-worms. Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body: this world is like a little turf of grass, and the heaven o'er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.
>
> (IV.ii.124-133)

After this disturbing retort, in reply the Duchess uses the interrogative once again, "Am not I thy duchess?" and Bosola again offers the brutal reply:

> Thou art some great woman, sure, for riot begins to sit on thy forehead, clad in gray hairs, twenty years sooner than on a merry milkmaid's. Thou sleepest worse than if a mouse should be forced to take up her lodging in a cat's ear: a little infant that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out, as if thou wert the more unquiet bedfellow.
>
> (IV.ii.135-140)

But she will not accept this belittling definition. Instead, in the face of the recent visitation of grotesque madmen, the simulated death of her husband and children, the presentation of a dead man's hand in hers, and Bosola's nihilism, she asserts herself: she establishes her own identity with the climactic line, "I am Duchess of Malfi still."

In her death, which follows swiftly upon these words, she is at last triumphant, for in facing death unafraid she has overcome the Jacobean's, or any age's, most feared enemy. Instead of fearing death, she welcomes it. "Pull, and pull strongly," she bids her executioners,

. . . for your able strength
Must pull down heaven upon me:—
Yet stay; heaven-gates are not so highly arch'd
As princes' palaces, they that enter there
Must go upon their knees.—(Kneels) Come violent death,
Serve for mandragorato make me sleep!
Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,
They then may feed in quiet. (They strangle her.)
(IV.ii.230-237)

The feverish attempts of Cariola to escape death, only serve to illuminate the majesty of the Duchess's death. And the crucial response to her death comes from him who ordered it. Although unmoved by the death of the children—"The death of young wolves is never to be pitied"—Ferdinand stops the relentless chain of charges against the Duchess when, seeing her dead, he cries, "Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle; she died young."

If the Duchess's assertion of her own identity in the line, "I am Duchess of Malfi still" marks the climax of the play, this line by Ferdinand marks his *peripeteia*. Only now can Ferdinand's ravings momentarily stop. And now for a terrible moment he sees himself. Unable to stand the sight of himself as murderer in the guise of divine punisher, he must now loose invectives upon Bosola, his agent; he must shift his own responsibility for this outrage upon another man. He releases the flood of his mixed emotions when he says:

Let me see her face again:—
Why didst not thou pity her? what an excellent
Honest man mightst thou have been
If thou hadst borne her to some sanctuary!
Or, bold in a good cause, oppos'd thyself
With thy advanced sword above thy head,
Between her innocence and my revenge!
I bade thee, when I was distracted of my wits,
Go kill my dearest friend, and thou hast don't.
For let me but examine well the cause:
What was the meanness of her match to me?
Only I must confess, I had a hope,
Had she continu'd widow, to have gain'd
An infinite mass of treasure by her death:
And that was the main cause: . . . her marriage!—
That drew a stream of gall, quite through my heart.
For thee, (as we observe in tragedies

That a good actor many times is curs'd
For playing a villain's part) I hate thee for 't:
And for my sake say thou hast done much ill well.
(IV.ii.271-291)

In effect, Ferdinand is denying any degree of responsibility for the murder of his sister, but in this *mélange* of emotions, he reveals a double motive. His conscious explanation—

I had a hope,
Had she continu'd widow, to have gain'd
An infinite mass of treasure by her death:

is cancelled out both by the fact that his inheritance is passed on to her one surviving son who escaped the carnage, and Ferdinand's more heart-felt motive:

And that was the main cause: . . . her marriage!—
That drew a stream of gall, quite through my heart.
seems the true one.[15]

Ironically, it is Ferdinand, the ruthless judge himself, who then asks Bosola, "By what authority didst thou execute / This bloody sentence?" It is precisely his own self-appointed authority as divine punisher, as physician-priest, that he is questioning now. When Bosola answers, "By yours—" Ferdinand again repudiates his previous stance, and condemns the instrument of his crime:

Mine? was I her judge?
Did any ceremonial form of law
Doom her to not-being? Did a complete jury
Deliver her conviction up i'th'court?
Where shalt thou find this judgement register'd
Unless in hell? See: Like a bloody fool
Th'hast forfeited thy life, and thou shalt die for't.
(IV.ii.299-305)

In his denial of responsibility in acting as judge in the execution of his sister, Ferdinand is now destroying his role of surrogate husband and revenger, a role which, according to James L. Calderwood, "would have been merely a private act of violence now assumes the status of ritual purgation, with the Duchess as sacrificial scapegoat and Ferdinand, already

her judge, as physician-priest-executioner who seeks the purgation of his own tainted blood in the purging of hers. Before the scene closes, Ferdinand reverts to the language of violence once more, but it is clear that he has found the solution. His final speech reveals an attitude far more terrifying than his earlier bluster, for it portends not merely an uninhibited, formless act of revenge but a patient, controlled, impersonal ceremony which will culminate with the Duchess' execution."[16]

But in now cancelling out responsibility for his previous stance of divine executioner, he leaves himself vulnerable, without the props of the role of divine punisher, which the masculine code provided, and which, in his case, served as a subterfuge for his own incestuous impulses as well. Of all the male characters discussed thus far, Ferdinand has played the role in its most perverse form, only to deny his actions at the sight of the *fait accompli*, the dead Duchess. When he denies his role in her death, he denies his *raison d'être*.

Calderwood fittingly closes his article on ceremonial styles with Ferdinand's questioning of Bosola:

> *Ferd.* By what authority did'st thou execute
> This bloody sentence?
> *Bos.* By yours—
> *Ferd.* Mine? Was I her Judge?
> Did any ceremoniall forme of Law,
> *Doom* her to not-Being?

and then concludes "The denial of 'any ceremoniall forme of Law,' of any communally sanctioned process by which revenge was executed, is aimed at depriving Bosola of reward, but instead deprives Ferdinand himself of that superficial ennoblement of motive which he had sought through an alliance with the forms of order. It is one of Ferdinand's last rational utterances, and it is thoroughly appropriate that as he approaches the disaster of mind which is correlative with the Duchess' death, Webster chooses to illumine the nature of Ferdinand's revenge by the same dramatic technique with which he illumined the nature of the offence: it is Webster's

final use of ceremony as an 'internal scale to measure depravity'" (144).

Critics have complained about the laborious last act after the death of the Duchess, but it does serve the function of portraying a world without hope. For Travis Bogard, "The fourth act shows the destruction of good by evil and the way in which humanity can assert its integrity even in defeat; the fifth act shows what happens in a world where good is dead and integrity is absent."[17]

A pointed contrast also appears in the depiction of the lascivious and casual wooing of Bosola by Julia, and the veiled yet determined commitment of the Duchess and Antonio in Act One. Here Julia's words:

> Now you'll say
> I am wanton: this nice modesty in ladies
> Is but a troublesome familiar
> That haunts them.
>
> (V.ii.168-172)

reveal her to be the true wanton against whom Ferdinand railed, and which the Duchess was not. With Ferdinand's retreat into lycanthropy, a fitting metaphor for his own bestiality, and Bosola's accidental killing of Antonio, we see a disordered world much more terrible than the Duchess' upsetting of degree by marrying Antonio.

Before his death, Ferdinand's last words still harp upon the Duchess: "My sister! O! my sister! there's the cause on't:" Like Eve, it would appear, she is blamed for everything. But to accept Ferdinand's indictment of her is to accept the words of a madman. The two sententious lines which follow are ambiguous, and appear to be an example of Webster's fondness for borrowings, which often confuse rather than illumine the dramatic text. "Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust" are Ferdinand's last words. In his edition, John Russell Brown glosses these lines with the note that "Ferdinand seems to imply that each man is his own worst enemy; but (as Dent suggested) he might mean that his sister was his 'own dust!" (p. 170).

The interpretation is as shifting and double as is Ferdinand's role in the play, and it is difficult to conclude with any certainty what exactly Ferdinand means here. Exactly where are our sympathies to lie—with the Duchess who, in defying her brothers, upset the order of the structured, patriarchal household—or with Ferdinand, who, for multiple reasons, tried to restrain his sister first from choosing and acting and then from living? Is the tragedy "the fault" of the Duchess or of Ferdinand, she who defied the masculine code, or he who upheld it?

Behind the shifting analyses of the conclusion, Webster, I think, furnishes one masterful "*coup*": the line of descent falls on the maternal, not the paternal or fraternal side, as Delio states:

> Let us make noble use
> Of this great ruin; and join all our force
> To establish this young, hopeful gentleman
> In's mother's right.
>
> (V.v.110-113)

The surviving son is that of the Duchess and Antonio, fruit of their secret marriage. To him, Webster allows the lineage of the Duchess; through him, Webster allows the Duchess of Malfi to live still.[18]

Perhaps no more fitting epitaph remains for the Duchess than this—the line of descent being transferred to the matriarchal line in the male-dominated world of the Italian Renaissance setting. For Travis Bogard in *The Tragic Satire of John Webster*: "Evil and good are dragged down together in death, just as they are meshed together in life. This is not a question of virtue and vice. In Webster's tragic world, characters are significant not because of their morality but because of their struggle. Some lose their identities in the forces of evil. Some die in the attempt to preserve the good. But ultimately it is the struggling ones, the splendid fighters for self, who matter" (78). It is the Duchess of Malfi who stands supreme in English Renaissance Drama, as one of "the splendid fighters for self." Placed in another context, it is she who most dramatically stands as woman as individual in English Renaissance Drama

—a defiance of the masculine code. And in her the dichotomy of "greatness" and "woman" are inextricably bound.

But if there are alps; there must be abysses. In a study of women who defied the masculine code of control and emerged triumphant, with some degree of autonomy, there exists as well one who overstepped the boundaries of human virtue and entered the dark wilderness of murder. Of one so inculcated in the social mores of the day that she deemed the loss of her virginity as a worse crime than the murder of a man. For a paradoxical image of a woman who both defied and inculcated the tenets of the masculine code, we turn now to Beatrice-Joanna in Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling*.

If Webster first presented the Duchess through the double lens of ambiguity, Middleton, who wrote the main plot, William Rowley the comic subplot, appears fascinated by the duality of Beatrice-Joanna. The most obvious index to this interest is her double name, a change from the source by John Reynolds, where she is simply called Beatrice, and different from Webster's conception of his heroine, whom he never names beyond her title of Duchess, which may be interpreted as a reinforcement of her nobility of station.

As with the Duchess, however, the first description of Beatrice-Joanna is an idealized one furnished by Alsemero, as he recounts his first sight of her in church:

> 'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her,
> And now again the same; what omen yet
> Follows of that? None but imaginary;
> Why should my hopes or fate be timorous?
> The place is holy, so is my intent:
> I love her beauties to the holy purpose,
> And that, methinks, admits comparison
> With man's first creation, the place blest,
> And is his right home back, if he achieve it.[19]
> (I.i.1-9)

Inherent in the idealized setting, however, is the sting of the loss of paradise, which Alsemero does not mention, but is implied as he speaks from the post-lapsarian point of view. Thus the oblique reference to the Garden of Eden in the last two lines may have elicited a double response from a Renais-

sance audience; for implicit in an allusion to the Garden of Eden is a recollection of Eve, whose reputation for the fall of man was somewhat less than paradisal.

When Alsemero speaks of his sudden love for her, Beatrice-Joanna's response is curiously stilted. She speaks in conventional platitudes of clear-sightedness, yet she suffers from an inner blindness which soon will become apparent to the audience. "Be better advis'd, sir:" she begins to Alsemero,

> Our eyes are sentinels unto our judgments,
> And should give certain judgment what they see;
> But they are rash sometimes, and tell us wonders
> Of common things, which when our judgments find,
> They can then check the eyes, and call them blind.
> (I.i.71-76)

But almost immediately this stance is reversed with her aside:

> For five days past
> To be recall'd! Sure, mine eyes were mistaken,
> This was the man was meant me; that he should come
> So near his time, and miss it!
> (I.i.82-86)

As the title implies, *The Changeling* is a study of, among other themes, a changeable woman who alternates in her selection of a husband or man of her choice, or more precisely, men of her choice, for she first loves Alsemero, then DeFlores, with Alonzo, her first fiancé, as a poor third choice, chosen for her by her father. Further, she has added murder to her actions in getting rid of Alonzo with the aid of DeFlores, thus turning defiance of the masculine code into defiance of the human code. In so doing, she emerges not as a triumphant heroine, but a decadent, if at times fascinating, villainness.

A grudging apology may be made for her on the grounds that she is trapped into the manipulative role-playing dictated by the patriarchal society in which she lives. Karl Holzknecht, for example, believes that "bound by the will of her father, who has betrothed her to Alonzo de Piracquo, 'A courtier and a gallant enrich'd / With many fair and noble ornaments,' Beatrice-Joanna nevertheless in Alsemero finds reason to rebel

against the fetters laid by custom upon her freedom, and resorts to desperate means to break them."[20]

Such sympathy with Beatrice-Joanna's motivation begins to break, however, when one realizes that instead of encouraging the duel between Alonzo and Alsemero, which the latter is willing to undertake in order to win her, she instantly lights upon the idea of murder, with DeFlores, a servant whom she detests, as her instrument. To what lengths may desperation go? Not to defy the human code by murder, Middleton appears to be saying. And yet ultimately it is Beatrice-Joanna and DeFlores who capture our interest, as if the characters have escaped from their creator to speak daringly for themselves. When DeFlores admits at the end that all the punishment of hell is worth the prize of Beatrice-Joanna's virginity, we believe him, while we tend to disbelieve, I think, Alsemero's petulant moralizing. Like its title, this play is filled with sudden turns and reversals. Ultimately our response to both Beatrice-Joanna and DeFlores may be a double response of sympathy and outrage, rather than that of simple affirmation or condemnation. While Rowley works with relatively simple contrasts in the subplot with Isabella opposed to Beatrice-Joanna in the main, Middleton appears to be working on a more complex filigree.

The name of DeFlores is also significant, for being "of the flowers" is ironic in that his ugliness is often alluded to. And deflowering is his chief ambition. Yet DeFlores is not a mere rake: he is also a man without illusions, at least initially, whereas Beatrice-Joanna, his beautiful mistress, in more ways than one, is filled with them. Thus the maze grows more intricate, the sympathies more diffused, until the psychological probing of the moral question is raised after DeFlores has murdered Alzono and comes to Beatrice-Joanna for his "reward."

Her incredulous response at his request that she offer herself up for repayment of his deed reveals how well she has inculcated the masculine code which demanded strict chastity on the part of women. In her protected Spanish upbringing, and bound by the dictates of her father, she has internalized the importance of her virginity to extreme limits, so much so

that she sees it as of absolute value, with murder but a secondary sin. Thus when DeFlores says,

> . . . . were I not resolv'd in my belief
> That thy virginity were perfect in thee,
> I should but take my recompense with grudging,
> As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for.
> (III.iv.116-119)

To this, Beatrice-Joanna responds with amazed naïveté:

> Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
> Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,
> To make his death the murderer of my honour!
> Thy language is so bold and vicious,
> I cannot see which way I can forgive it
> With any modesty.
> (III.iv.120-124)

DeFlores soon instructs her to the knowledge of her present state as murderess—"Push, you forget yourself! / A woman dipp'd in blood, and talk of modesty." These words mark her initiation into an understanding of morality, as well as immorality, and having once been an accomplice to murder, she finds herself forever after on the debit side. Although she struggles briefly like a caught animal, at the end of Act Three, she capitulates and does DeFlores' bidding.

A woman of beauty and high station, she might well have seemed another Elizabethan heroine on the surface at least, instead of representing the depths of Jacobean decadence. Even her earlier speech to DeFlores, in which she expresses a wish to have been born male would not have disqualified her from the ranks of good women. Her speech: "Would creation—" "Had form'd me man," might well have been the words of a Paulina or a Rosalind or a Beatrice. The selfish and murderous motivation of the following, however, would not.

> Oh, 'tis the soul of freedom!
> I should not then be forc'd to marry one
> I hate beyond all depths, I should have power
> Then to oppose my loathings, nay, remove 'em
> For ever from my sight.
> (II.ii.109-113)

In Beatrice-Joanna, Middleton has created a Janus-faced figure who clearly deserves the epithet of damned. With her restricted Spanish background, she sins most by prizing her honor before a man's life. She is through most of the play little more than a wilful child, although her progressive deterioration and descent into further sin are both a fascinating and terrifying study.

If DeFlores brutally educates her into a knowledge of her changed nature after the murder of Alonzo, he at least makes a distinction between her honor and the value of life. Ironically, however, it is he who most values her virginity, only to debase it. And in subjecting her to the virginity test, Alsemero's actions testify that, without her virginity, Beatrice-Joanna is worthless to him. To this extent, the foolish and wilful Beatrice-Joanna is trapped in a Spanish world where decisions concerning woman's destiny are made by men, and the woman is free to react or to act circuitiously, not directly.

The subplot, attributed to William Rowley, parallels the tragic plot in many ways. The familiar figure of the jealous husband appears in Alcibius; the chaste but suspected wife in Isabella. Madmen appear to tempt her, but Isabella remains firm in mind and morals. The implicit contrast pits Beatrice-Joanna's actions against those of Isabella more effectively than a treatise of the period which purported to distinguish between the good woman and the bad.

Beatrice-Joanna, too, is tested. In Act Four, after the murder of Alonzo and her reluctant submission to DeFlores, she undergoes a testing of her virginity by Alsemero, but she foils him by first reading the proper reaction expected of a maiden from a convenient medical book she has found. "'Give the party you suspect the quantity of a spoonful of the water in the glass M, which upon her that is a maid makes three several effects: 'twill make her incontinently gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last into a violent laughing; else dull, heavy, and lumpish'" (IV.i.45-50).

Having surreptitiously passed this test by clever acting, Beatrice-Joanna now must face the ultimate test of her virginity at the nuptial bed. One cannot overstress the importance

of this test, for to the male mind it determined whether or not a woman was an angel or a devil, a saint or a whore; there were no gradations. In some cases, the matter could mean the literal difference between life and death. In the introduction to *The Duchess of Malfi*, F. L. Lucas cites a historical example and states that "we find it difficult to imagine the violence of family pride in the sixteenth-century Spaniard or Italian. We have to realize that these things were different in an age and land in which, for instance, the six sons of Lelio Massimo, on their father's second marriage, entered the bridal-chamber next morning and shot the bride in bed, because she was a cast-off mistress of Marcantonio Colonna" (24).

One still reads of similar deeds today. For example, one young Italian shot his suspected bride, only to discover later, by medical tests, that she was a virgin. The date: 1973.

Beatrice-Joanna temporarily solves her dilemma by substituting her maid Diaphanta during the wedding night. The problem arises when Diaphanta overdoes her duty and stays too long. Beatrice-Joanna reveals her inner blindness and hypocrisy when she cries:

> This strumpet serves her own ends, 'tis apparent now,
> Devours the pleasure with a greedy appetite,
> And never minds my honour or my peace.
> (V.i.2-4)

Even now Beatrice-Joanna does not realize her own fall from honor; she fails to comprehend the irony of her words. When DeFlores offers to kill Diaphanta by instigating a fire to generate alarm and to allow Beatrice-Joanna to return to Alsemero's room, she willingly agrees to yet another murder. Indeed, her initial hatred for DeFlores has now turned into a kind of perverse love. As he leaves to set the fire, she says, "I'm forc'd to love thee now, / Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour." Even at this point, with a second murder to her discredit, she cannot fully comprehend the nature of her offense, so consumed is she to protect what society has deemed most precious—her honor, her good name—which, by now, of course, are gone forever.

When the alarm of fire is given, she lapses into a romanticism which recalls Romeo and Juliet, but is now debased into a parody:

> Already? How rare is that man's speed!
> How heartily he serves me! His face loathes one,
> But look upon his care, who would not love him?
> The east is not more beauteous than his service.
> (V.i.69-72)

It is up to Alsemero to provide the conventional standard, the norm, whereby one is to judge Beatrice-Joanna, and his male stance is familiar. Having suspected her with DeFlores, Alsemero begins the confrontation with the quibbling question:

> Als. Are you honest?
> Beat. Ha, ha, ha! That's a broad question, my lord.
> Als. But that's not a modest answer, my lady:
> Do you laugh? My doubts are strong upon me.
> (V.iii.20-22)

When Beatrice-Joanna replies that "'Tis innocence that smiles," Alsemero swiftly retaliates with the damning epithet:

> 'Twere but hypocrisy of a sadder colour,
> But the same stuff; neither your smiles nor tears
> Shall move or flatter me from my belief:
> You are a whore!
> (V.iii.29-31)

Beatrice's response is still curiously childish—

> What a horrid sound it hath!
> It blasts a beauty to deformity;
> Upon what face soever that breath falls,
> It strikes it ugly: oh, you have ruin'd
> What you can ne'er repair again.
> (V.iii.32-35)

Trapped by Alsemero's charge, however, she can only plead guilty by reason of her love for him, and adds murder to his charge of adultery:

> Your love has made me
> A cruel murd'ress. . . .

A bloody one;
I have kiss'd poison for't, strok'd a serpent:
That thing of hate, worthy in my esteem
Of no better employment, and him most worthy
To be so employ'd, I caus'd to murder
That innocent Piracquo, having no
Better means than that worst, to assure
Yourself to me.
(V.iii.64-72)

In a sense she is right. In order to marry Alsemero, she had to rid herself of Alonzo. However, murder was a dire expedient. Alsemero stands astounded: "Oh, thou art all deform'd!" Beatrice-Joanna then leaves the room with the ironic claim, "Remember I am true unto your bed."

The male bond still remains intact, however. Alsemero seeks the truth from DeFlores, and DeFlores answers with one absolute: "'Twas but one thing, and that—she's a whore." And Alsemero wallows in self-pitying anti-feminist relief:

It could not choose but follow; oh cunning devils!
How should blind men know you from fair-fac'd saints?
(V.iii.108-109)

For a critical examination of these two male characters, in *The Art of Thomas Middleton*, David M. Holmes says:

> Alsemero, whose 'frailty' is a pharisaical distaste for 'toucht' women, and who possesses an absurd physician's closet and a 'pretty secret' to 'know whether a woman be maid, or not,' is punished with poetic justice; 'I a suppos'd husband chang'd embraces with wantonness' he says at the end of the play; the fact that he has been taken in by the substitution of Diaphanta, not hitherto 'touch't' by man but readily corruptible, and has derived with complete satisfaction from 'wantonness' all that he looked for from Beatrice, has given a final emphasis to his original superficiality. Diaphanta and Beatrice both meet their ends at the hands of DeFlores: he shoots Diaphanta and then burns her in a fire that he has set earlier ('oh poor virginity! Thou hast paid dearly for't . . . Diaphanta's burnt'); later he completes Beatrice's confession for her ('she's a whore', and stabs her). Last to die is DeFlores himself; he dispatches himself, absurdly, with his pen-knife.[21]

All that remains is denunciation of her from her father Vermandero to make the male outrage complete. DeFlores brings Beatrice in wounded, and voices another anti-feminist

refrain: "I am so stout yet, / And so, I think, that broken rib of mankind." As Vermandero stands amazed, Beatrice-Joanna repents to her father, and yet there is a ring of defiance in her speech to Alsemero:

> O come not near me, sir, I shall defile you;
> I am that of your blood was taken from you;
> For your better health; look no more upon't,
> But cast it to the ground regardlessly:
> Let the common sewer take it from distinction.
> Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor
> Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
> I ne'er could pluck it from him: my loathing
> Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believ'd;
> Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.
> Alsemero, I am a stranger to your bed,
> Your bed was cozen'd on the nuptial night,
> For which your false bride died.
> (V.iii.149-161)

When DeFlores joins in with

> Yes; and the while I coupled with your mate
> At barley-brake; now we are left in hell.

old Vermandero concludes with sorrow, "We are all there, it circumscribes here."

As Helen Gardner has pointed out in her essay, "'The Changeling' and The Tragedy of Damnation," "The echo from *Doctor Faustus* cannot be accidental."[22] In Beatrice-Joanna and DeFlores we find characters who defied not only the masculine, but the moral code of English Renaissance Drama. For the latter indictment there is little sympathy. For the former, the indictment seems blurred. Due to the rigidity of her upbringing, Beatrice-Joanna stands as one who inculcated too well the dictates of the masculine code, prizing her honor above all else. But in this world the men do the same—it is they who prescribe the moral code and mores. Alsemero's outrage is typical of the deceived husband. DeFlores' defiance, however, is more puzzling. Just before stabbing himself, he proclaims:

> I lov'd this woman in spite of her heart;
> Her love I earn'd out of Piracquo's murder.

. . . .and her honour's prize
Was my reward; I thank life for nothing
But that pleasure: it was so sweet to me
That I have drunk up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me.
(V.iii.165-166; 168-171)

Dipped now in his own blood, the decadent DeFlores can proclaim that the murder of man was worth the reward of the woman he desired. In a curious, even perverse way, this play demonstrates as well as any other the price men placed on woman's "honesty." DeFlores wins Beatrice-Joanna's virginity much as male competitors win a contest: it is his reward. In spite of her duplicity, even her stupidity, Beatrice-Joanna serves as an index to show that she is little more than a sheep—even if a black or deformed one—in this society. With her virginity intact, she is prized; without it, she is scorned. When her self-worth is based on this qualification alone, it is little wonder that she prizes her honesty and her reputation more than another's life. If Beatrice-Joanna is deformed, so is the Spanish male-dominated society which produced her.

After the deaths of DeFlores and Beatrice-Joanna, whose last words reveal a traditional submissive stance at last—a quite conventional conclusion—

Forgive me, Alsemero, all forgive;
'Tis time to die, when 'tis a shame to live.

Alsemero answers with an epilogue which reasserts the reign of the male ruler:

All we can do to comfort one another,
To stay a brother's sorrow for a brother,
To dry a child from the kind father's eyes,
Is to no purpose, it rather multiplies:
Your only smiles have power to cause relive
The dead again, or in their rooms to give
Brother a new brother, father a child;
If these appear, all griefs are reconcil'd.
(V.iii.220-228)

You will note that the word "woman" does not appear. It is as if, after the instance of Beatrice-Joanna, the word is forever

infamous. But then, this idea is nothing new, only the reworking of an old theme. In this sense, *The Changeling* is a curious blending of a reactionary and a far-sighted play: revealing the male's horror of a 'toucht' woman, and, at the same time, showing that in the Spanish world Beatrice-Joanna has few alternatives. The effect of the play, written in 1623, is enormously disturbing because its limitations on woman seem to allow only for negative options in order to break the mold of masculine control.

In addition to *The Changeling*, Middleton wrote, among others, *The Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) and *Women Beware Women* (1623-7), both of which explore the theme of woman's position in a corrupt society. In his introduction to *Women Beware Women*, Charles Barber offers insights which apply as well to *The Changeling*.

> 'Like our own Sex, we have no Enemy', says the dying Brancha, and the title of the play expresses the same view. But what the play itself reveals is something quite different: it shows that woman's worst enemy is man, and depicts the perversions to which women become subject when they are simply the property of men in a male-dominated society, a society moreover in which everything has its cash price. Livia, who entraps the other two women, does so on behalf of men—Isabella for Hippolito, and Brancha for the Duke. When she tries to behave like the men, and buy a lover for herself, they very soon put a stop to that, for she lives in a society where there is one rule for men and another for women.[23]

If Livia and Beatrice-Joanna do not elicit our admiration, they do reflect the double standard for men and women in English Renaissance Drama and may be said to mirror the social life of the age. Further, the growing importance of women in commercial and social spheres was examined in the drama, and Louis B. Wright concludes that

> This activity and boldness of women, especially women of the middle class, aroused the ire of conservatives who vented their displeasure in pulpit, and were answered by staunch defenders of the virtues of the criticized sex. Even stage plays took up the cudgels. For example, in the early seventeenth century the indictment of the extravagance, greed, folly, and lust of tradesmen's wives is a frequent theme of Middleton's comedies, whereas Thomas Heywood's plays—though sometimes dramatizing feminine weakness—offer many a stout passage in the portrayal of their intelligence, spirit, and wisdom" (466).

This divergence of opinion on the subject of women can be seen by cataloguing some of the satirists and defenders of the sex. Among the most famous detractors are the author of *Schole house of women* (about 1542) and attributed to Edward Gosenhill; John Knox, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558); Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583); Stephen Gosson, *Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen* (1595); and Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, idle, froward and unconstant women* (1615), as well as the anonymous author of *Hic Mulier or the Man-Woman* (1620).

The attacks did not go unanswered. Indeed in the case of Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women* (1540), praise preceded attack. Other notable defenders of women were Edward More in *The Defence of Women and Especially of Englyshe Women* (1560); Nicholas Breton's *The Praise of Virtuous Ladies* (1599); and Daniel Tuvil's *Asylum Veneris* (1616).

Finally women writers began to appear. The first is Rachel Speght, who in 1617, wrote *A Mouzell for Melastomus, The Cynical Bayter of, and foule mouthed Barker against Evahs Sex,* which was an attempt to silence the notorious Swetnam, as well as the weighty biblical anti-feminism which, largely by interpretation, held that woman was inferior to man. In a systematic effort to refute old arguments against women, Rachel Speght writes:

> Secondly, the materiall cause, or matter whereof woman was made, was of a refined mould, if I may so speake: for man was created of the dust of the earth, but woman was made of a part of man, after that he was a living soule; yet was shee not produced from Adams foote, to be his low inferiour; nor from his head to be his superiour, but from his side, neare his heart, to be his equall; that where he is Lord, she may be Lady: and therefore saith God concerning man and woman jointly, 'Let them rule over the fish of the sea, & over the fowles of the Heaven, & over every beast that moueth upon the earth:' by which words, he makes their authority equall, & all creatures to be in subjection unto them both. This being rightly considered, doth teach men to make such account of their wives, as Adam did of Eve, 'This is bone of my bone, & flesh of my flesh:' As also, that they neither doe or with any more hurt unto them, then unto their owne bodies: for men oughte to love their wives as themselves, because hee that loves his wife, loves himselfe: And never man hated his owne flesh (which the woman is) unlesse a monster in nature.
>
> (Bodleian MS.)

Esther Sowerman follows with another defense of women in the same year, 1617, and place, London, with *Ester hath hang'd Haman: Or An Answere To a lewd Pamphlet, entitled, The Arraignment of Women.* In this spirited treatise, the author tells in "The Epistle Dedicatory to all Right Honorable, Noble, & worthy Ladies, Gentlewomen, & others, virtuously disposed, of the Faeminine Sexe," of how she first learned of Swetnam's attack upon women.

> Right Honourable, & all others of our Sexe, upon my repaire to London this last Michaelmas Terme; being at supper amongst friends, where the number of each sexe were equall; as nothing is more usuall for table-talke; there fell out a discourse concerning women, some defending, others objecting against our Sex: Upon whiche occasion, there happened a mention of a Pamphlet entitled *The Arraignment of Women,* which I was desirous to see. The next day a Gentleman brought me the Booke, which when I had superficially runne over, I found the discourse as far off from performing what the title promised, as I found it scandalous & blasphemous: for where the author pretended to write against lewd, idle, & unconstant women, hee doth most impudently rage & rayle generally against all the whole sexe of women. Whereupon, I in defence of our Sexe, began an answer to that shamefull Pamphlet.
>
> (Bodleian MS.)

Disappointed, she says, by the defense of women made by "a Ministers daughter," Miss Sowerman goes on to state the purpose of her defense:

> The ends for which I undertooke this enterprise, are these. First, to set out the glory of Almightie God, in so blessed a worke of his Creation. Secondly, to encourage all Noble, Honorable, & worthy Women, to expresse in their course of life & actions, that they are the same Creatures which they were designed to be by their Creator, & by their Redeemer: And to parallel those women, whose virtuous examples are collected briefly out of the Olde & New Testament. Lastly, I write for the shame & confusion of such as degenerate from woman-hoode, & disasspoint the ends of Creation, & Redemption. There can be no greater encouragement to true Nobility, then to know & stand upon the honour of Nobility, nor any greater confusion & shame, then for Nobility to dismount & abuse it selfe to ignoble & degenerate courses. You are women; in Creation, noble, in Redemption, gracious, in use most blessed. Be not forgetfull of your selves, nor unthankefull to that Author from whom you receive all.
>
> (Bodleian MS.)

Aside from the instance of critical in-fighting, the two women are united in their plea for the equal authority of women, whom they see as inherently noble in the eyes of God. Finally another women, writing under the pseudonym of Constantia Munda, published *The Worming of a mad Dogge: Or, A Soppe for Cerberus The Iaylor of Hell* (London, 1617), in which she lampoons the scribblings of writers against women. Revealing that she is learned in Latin, as well as sarcasm, Miss Munda begins:

> Woman the second edition of the Epitome of the whole world, the Second Tome of that goodly volume compiled by the great God of heaven and earth is most shamefully blurd, & derogatively rased by scribling penns of savage & uncought monsters. To what an irregular straine is the daring impudence of blind-fold bayards aspired unto? that they will presume to call in question even the most absolute worke composed by the worlds great Architect? . . . Yet woman the greatest part of the lesser world is generally become the subject of every pedanticall goose-quill. Every fantasticke Poetaster which thinkes he hath lickt the vomit of his Coriphaeus & can but patch a hobling verse together, will strive to represent unseemly figments imputed to our Sex, (as a pleasing theme to the vulgar) on the publique theatre: teaching the worser sort that are more prone to luxurie, a compendious way to learne to be sinfull. These foule mouth'd raylers *qui non vident ut corrigant, sed quaerunt quid reprehendant,* that reproove not that they might reforme, but pry into actions that they might carpe & cavill. . . . they blush not in their tongues to carry the gall of *Rabilius,* & in their chops the poyson of *Colimachus* in their mouthes, the flame of mount AEtna in their eyes *Jupiters* lightning which he darted at the *Centaures,* in their thoughts *Bellonaes* arrows, in their serpentine words the bitternesse of *Sulmo* against *Orbecca,* blending & commixing all their discourse with . . . unsavourie simples, deriving all their ingredients of their venomed Recipes from the Apothecaries shop of the Devill.
>
> (Bodleian MS.)

According to Louis B. Wright,

> The stage, of which Constantia Munda complained, became the medium for a renewed satire on Swetnam and a vindication of the female sex in 1620 when *Swetnam, The Woman-hateer, Arraigned by Women* was staged and printed. In the play Swetnam is discomfited by his woman antagonist, haled before a tribunal, convicted of abusing women, tortured, and dragged muzzled through the streets until he finally recants. Swetnam's attack and the controversy which it engendered reveal two significant facts: that the average woman was becoming articulate in her own defense and that she was demanding social independence unknown in previous generations (490).

The object of the ladies' ire was, among others, Joseph Swetnam, who in *The Araignment of Lewd, idle, froward and unconstant women* (London, 1615), wrote:

> Moses describeth a woman thus. At the first beginning (saith he) a woman was made to be a helper unto man, and so they are indeed, for she helpeth to spend and consume that which man painefully getteth. He also saith that they were made of the ribbe of a man and that their froward nature sheweth, for a ribbe is a crooked thing by nature, for small occasion will cause them to be angry. Againe, in a manner she was no sooner made but straight way her minde was set upon mischiefe, for by her aspiring minde and wanton will she quickly procured mans fall, and therefore ever since they are and have been a woe unto man, and follow the line of their first leader.
>
> (Bodleian MS.)

This excerpt from Swetnam exemplifies the conservative or reactionary stance of man's attitude towards woman. But it is not the stance of Shakespeare or Webster or even Middleton. For they used the conventional masculine attack upon woman only, in varying degrees, to reverse it, and to expose the masculine code which controlled women. If Beatrice-Joanna represents the logical end of these controls, Hermione and Paulina as rare survivors, and the Duchess as a tragic victim, we must consider those women who survived not so much by subterfuge or defiance, as by the device of the disguise. The heroines of Shakespeare's comedies on the whole represent deviations from the norm of male control. The question that might be asked is if these deviations were wholly felicitous, or merely a panache rather than a panacea. The fifth act follows.

Notes

1 J. H. P. Pafford, ed., *The Winter's Tale*, The Arden Shakespeare (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), xlvii.

2 Prosser, 78.

3 F. L. Lucas, ed., *The Duchess of Malfi* (1927; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 14. Lucas places the probable date of *The Duchess* at 1612-14; the generally accepted date of *The Winter's Tale* is 1611-12.

4 Norman Rabkin, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations* of *'The Duchess of Malfi'* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 4.

5 Lucas, "Historical Introduction," 22.

6 John Russell Brown, ed., *The Duchess of Malfi* (1964; rpt. London: Methuen, 1969), 199.

7 In Appendix I of Brown's edition, Painter concludes: "You see the miserable discourse of a Princesse loue, that was not very wise, and of a gentleman that had forgotten his estate, which ought to serue for a loking glasse to them which be ouer hardie in making of enterprises, and doe not measure their abilitie with the greatnesse of their attemptes: where they ought to maintaine themselues in reputation, and beare the title of wel aduised: foreseeing their ruine to be example to all posteritie, as may be seene by the death of *Bologna*, and of all them which sprang of him, and of his infortunate spouse his Ladie and mistresse" (208).

8 Rabkin, 6.

9 Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 147.

10 Brown, xlviii.

11 All subsequent references will be taken from the edition by John Russell Brown.

12 James L. Calderwood, "*The Duchess of Malfi*: Styles of Ceremony," *Essays in Criticism*, XII (1962), 136.

13 Calderwood, 142.

14 See Inga-Stina Ekeblad, "The 'Impure Art' of John Webster," *Review of English Studies*, IX (1958), 253-67.

15 John Russell Brown glosses lines 281-7 as follows: "A break in sense (and the actor's delivery) seems inevitable before and after 'her marriage'; the alternative is emendation. (For comparable abrupt changes in the course of a speech, cf. *W.D.*, II.i.78, note). The hope of 'infinite' treasure is a spurious explanation: it is designed to deceive Bosola (cf. *Rom.*, V.iii.28-32, where Romeo deceives Balthasar) or, rather, it is an instinctive attempt to 'cover up' the deep feeling exposed by 'dearest friend' of 1. 280, or even deeper feelings of guilt. (The speech does not read like self-questioning; the context is too impassioned.) After the confession of 1. 287, Ferdinand again veers, to attack the only man he can" (132).

16 Calderwood, 143.

17 Bogard, 140.

18 A puzzling footnote appears in the 1967 reprint of Lucus' 1927 edition. It reads: "There is no reason to imagine Antonio's son as more than a child. The historical Antonio's eldest son must have been about seven or eight when his father was murdered. But Webster seems to forget that the Duchess's heir was her son by her first husband, whom he mentions at III.3.82" (p. 207). There is no such gloss in Lucus' original 1927 edition. Although this may point to an oversight on Webster's part in forgetting the first son, I would prefer to accept the stage directions which allow the line of descent to fall to Antonio's son, thus endorsing the marriage as legitimate, and casting ultimate sympathy with Antonio and the Duchess.

19 N. W. Bawcutt, ed., The *Changeling* (1958); rpt. London: Methuen, 1970), 3-4. All subsequent references to the play will be from this edition.

20 Karl L. Holzknecht, "The Dramatic Structure of *The Changeling*," in *Shakespeare's Contemporaries*, eds., Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 373.

21 David M. Holmes, *The Art of Thomas Middleton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 174-5.

22 Helen Cardner, "*The Changeling* and The Tragedy of Damnation," *English Studies* (1948), 66.

23 Charles Barber, ed., *Women Beware Women*, The Fountainwell Drama Texts (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969), 3.

V

Woman as Actor

Although we have seen a progression from a predominantly passive character such as Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Ophelia in *Hamlet*, to the active assertiveness of Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, and the final defiance of the Duchess in her calm acceptance of death, it appears that the alternatives for women *qua* women are few in English Renaissance Drama—either to defy the dictates of the masculine code, to counter them by subterfuge, or to accept them. In any case, the fact that they are women in a man's world places them in a dangerously precarious position.

In at least three Shakespearean comedies, however, notably *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97), *As You Like It* (1599), and *Twelfth Night* (1600-1601), as well as, to a lesser degree, in The *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1592-93?) and *Cymbeline* (1609-10), a different pattern emerges as women (who were, of course, played by boys, thus creating a double disguise) don male garb and appear for a time as equals in a male world where they are allowed to openly initiate the action. In her introduction to *As You Like It* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Anne Barton makes the following observation about the efficacy of Rosalind's disguise:

> Long after such a masculine impersonation is necessary, Rosalind clings to the part of Ganymede because of the freedom it allows her. In her boy's disguise, she escapes (for a time) the limitations of being a woman, Duke Senior's daughter, the conscious object of Orlando's love. She learns a great deal about herself, about Orlando, and about love itself which she could not have done within the normal conventions of society (366).

John Dover Wilson agrees that the device of the disguise is a liberating influence when, in *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies*, he notes:

> Rosalind's doublet and hose possess many advantages. They enable her to play the 'boy' as well as the 'lady' of the play; the audience is led to expect 'saucy lackey' talk (III.ii.293) and she gives it to them. They complicate the plot by causing Phoebe to fall in love with her. Above all they give opportunity for entertaining scenes with Orlando in which he woos his lady in pretence and she pretends to mock at love to the man she is deeply in love with.
>
> Yet they also set Shakespeare a serious dramatic problem. For inasmuch as the audience knew that the Rosalind who played the boy was in reality a boy playing a girl pretending to be a boy, it is a doubly difficult task to win from them that willing suspension of disbelief which we call dramatic illusion. It was nevertheless the magnitude of this difficulty, I believe, which gave us the Rosalind the world rejoices in.[1]

A second cause for celebration, I would think, is that the "woman" character has been set free to do what the men were always allowed to do: to act, instead of to react. In varying degrees, Rosalind, Portia, Viola, Julia, and Imogen are granted a sense of autonomy which was withheld from them as women undisguised.

Concomitant to the device of the disguise, Shakespeare often includes a familiar Renaissance theme of the debate between love and friendship, a theme which is especially central to *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Here we find a concept of male bonding where, for a time, the force of male friendship is made to overshadow that of fidelity to a woman. This is seen in *The Merchant of Venice* when Bassanio gives Portia's ring away in gratitude for the saving of his friend, Antonio, thus breaking his pledge to never part with the ring. Ironically, of course, he gives the ring to Portia herself, who is disguised as the young Doctor of Laws, so that the "betrayal" is reduced to a test, which Bassanio must learn to pass.

Similarly, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the idea of male friendship or bonding is found between Valentine and Proteus. As a test of their friendship, Valentine gives Silvia to

Proteus, only to discover that his male friend is about to ravish her. He rejects him with the words:

> Thou common friend, that's without faith of love,
> For such is a friend now! treacherous man,
> Thou hast beguil'd my hopes!
> (V.iv.62-64)

In both cases, Shakespeare appears to be positing the idea that the greater bond is ultimately to the woman. And in this manner another version of the masculine code has been undercut.

Further, in dealing with the conventionally conflicting ideas of love and friendship, Shakespeare appears to be suggesting an extraordinary resolution: that after disguised entrance into the male world, the disguise once lifted, she may emerge as the man's equal or friend. Thus the disguise not only obscures the woman's identity; it frees her to a new dimension: she appears to be a man only to reappear as a woman, turning into both friend and lover. Once a "man," the status of equality is recalled when she is a "woman." Such multiplicity of sex roles achieves the purpose of reducing them, thus allowing for an equality of roles in the tailspin of reversals.

In his introduction to *Early Plays from the Italian*, R. Warwick Bond summarizes the progression from the female bondage found in the classical plays to a freedom found in the disguise in English Renaissance Drama:

> The chief change is in the position of the heroine. In Greek and Roman comedy, the scene being always in a public place, respectable, unmarried girls could take no part. The heroine, therefore, either does not appear, or, as a more frequent alternative, is lowered to the rank of *psaltria tibicina*, or other girl in charge of a *leno* or *lena*, although she is often discovered in the end to be of free birth, and assumes her proper rank. The changed cinquecento conditions are reflected in the fact that young men are no longer attracted solely by these *declasses*, but usually fall in love with respectable girls, though the plot may require that they shall be poor or dependent, and not a match which a calculating parent would approve. But Italian custom, equally, with classical, forbade the appearance of citizens' daughters in the streets; so that the drama would have lost, not gained, by the change in young men's taste, but for the device, introduced from the *novelle*, of presenting girls in male disguise. To English notions such disguise

> involves a much greater shock to modesty, as is felt by the Julia and Jessica of Shakespeare, who borrowed the idea perhaps from Montemayor, perhaps from Italian novelists, perhaps even directly from Italian plays. To the Italian dramatist the male dress excused the heroine's appearance in male company, and conferred upon her the right to talk.[2]

But Shakespeare's women were always allowed the right to talk; the problem occurred when they wanted to act directly as well. With the disguise, they were at last free to do both, unencumbered by male prejudice against them. In *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, Portia, the principal female character, is allowed to talk and to act with a vengence as (you will excuse the antithesis) she pleads for mercy. While garbed as a learned Doctor of Laws from Rome, a disguise which allows her to test both the fidelity of her new husband, Bassanio, and to distinguish between the efficacy of the Old and New Testaments' definitions of justice, she determines the fate of both Shylock and Antonio by carrying Shylock's legalistic pronouncement of a pound of flesh to a *reductio ad absurdum*: Shylock is to glean his pound of flesh from Antonio, but not to spill one drop of Christian blood. In her advocacy of mercy, which Shylock rejects, and her subsequent legalistic interpretation of the law which paradoxically turns on Shylock and freezes his ability to act, Portia succeeds in initiating the pivotal action of the play through her use of wit. In this scene two elements appear necessary for the *coup*: her disguise and her intelligence. Ultimately both are needed for the female character to gain entrance into the world of men.

But this astonishing legal reversal accomplished by a woman of wit appears a far cry from the first appearance of Portia who, in Act One, scene two, is introduced by the melancholy words: "By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is a-weary of this great world." At first glance, she is the conventional daughter, restricted by the dictates of her dead father's will which insists that her husband be chosen not by herself, but by him who choses the right casket. Regretting her lack of free choice, she laments:

> O me, the word choose! I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse who I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curb'd by the will of a

> dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?
>
> (I.ii.22-26)

Strangely enough, however, Nerissa's reply, "Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations" proves to be correct, for the casket test serves to shield Portia from false suitors. Apart from this initial conventional image, however, Shakespeare has allowed Portia to exercise an astonishing freedom through the use of her intelligence. Although initially she is presented as the archetypal feminine character, bewailing her bondage to her father's will, we soon see that she is by no means a passive victim: she is, after all, able to indirectly choose her own husband as much as he chooses her, by furnishing clues in a prefatory song which she sings before Bassanio, the man of her choice, decides on one of the three caskets. In addition, by mocking the presumptions of her undesired suitors, she reverses, for once, the anti-feminist tradition in which men railed against women. For once, she punctures the overweening pride of men with satirical aplomb. In so doing, she achieves a kind of independence of spirit which remains unpunished and stands as an example of feminine outspokenness. It is interesting in passing that Craig comments:

> There is nothing of the mercenary lady of Belmonte left in the charming and virtuous Portia, unless one can see it in the somewhat unsympathetic discussion of the various wooers by Portia and Nerissa, and in Portia's cavalier dismissal of Morocco and Aragon:
>
> A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go,
> Let all of his complexion choose me so. . . .
>
> There is a rather hard tone in Portia's description of her suitors. The lady of the source was, however, much more cruel.[3]

There is no such questioning of Hamlet's railing at Ophelia, however. Craig's remarks betray a glimmer of surprise when the male sex is maligned; none when the female is.

In spite of her spirited raillery, however, Portia is no man-hater, and her attacks show more wit than malice. One example may serve to illustrate this. In reply to Nerissa's question, "How like you the young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew?" Portia replies,

> Very vilely in the morning, when he is sober, and most vilely in the afternoon when he is drunk. When he is best, he is a little worse than a man, and when he is worst, he is little better than a beast. And the worst fall that ever fell, I hope I shall make shift to go without him.
>
> (I.ii.86-91)

Or another, the Neapolitan prince:

> Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself. I am much afeard my lady his mother play'd false with a smith.
>
> (I.ii.40-44)

Like Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Portia is attempting to find, and to define, a good man. When Nerissa mentions Bassanio and says, "he, of all men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon, was the most deserving of a fair lady," Portia agrees, saying simply: "I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy praise." Thus, Portia is selective in her criticism and her commendation—she rails not at all men, but sees individual short-comings of several, as well as the virtues of one. Instead of labelling this exchange as having a "rather hard tone," as Craig does, I think it conveys Portia's astuteness and wit. And, paradoxically, under the pretense of decrying that she has no choice, Portia makes her choice absolutely clear.

Ultimately Portia's conflict is not with her father's will, but rather with the male bond of friendship which Bassanio's relationship with Antonio represents, when it threatens to disrupt the marital bond between Bassanio and Portia. However, even then Portia handles the problem with finesse.

When we first meet Antonio in the opening act, he appears to be suffering from a sense of world-weariness. "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad," he begins. And when Salerio and Solanio suggest possible reasons for this mood—love or the loss of his ships—both are dismissed as unsatisfactory. Something deeper troubles Antonio, and it appears to be the foreknowledge that he will lose his friend Bassanio to the lady Portia. According to Anne Barton:

> *The Merchant of Venice* is a play about contrasted attitudes towards wealth and the life-styles dictated by each, but it is also a comedy which returns to that question of love and friendship and the rivalry between them which Shakespeare had first explored in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. There seems little point in trying to extract from the play any explicit statement that Antonio's love for Bassanio is homosexual in origin. What is clear is that Antonio's unexplained melancholy in the opening scene is somehow connected with Bassanio's recently expressed intention to seek a wife, although Antonio himself never says so directly, and although he himself is far too magnanimous to refuse to help Bassanio in his enterprise (252).

Indeed, this play may be viewed as a cornucopia of contrasts: love versus friendship, mercy versus legalistic justice, Belmont versus Venice. In each case, Portia embodies the qualities found in the first set of the series, Antonio the second. To suggest that she lies on the winning side, however, would be too simplistic, for Antonio does represent the best male friend that Bassanio could ever have, and so the tensions are magnified. And yet there does seem to be in Portia and what she represents a kind of transcendence, a reconciliation of warring factions. Again Anne Barton notes, "As generous as Antonio and as reflective, equally capable of self-sacrificing love, she has perceptions and energies, an emotional wholeness and range of response which he lacks. It is only Portia, in her disguise as the young lawyer, who can rescue Venice from its dilemma" (p. 252).

Thus is Portia not only the spiritual embodiment of a higher law of mercy, she is, in effect, the instrument which serves to reconcile the contending factions of masculine and feminine love. When Shakespeare adorns her with the device of the disguise, he allows her to become something she already is: a spokesman for true justice, a feminine authority at last equal to that of man. Or need I say a spokesperson for true justice?

In the courtroom, as Antonio prepares to die for his friend Bassanio, he finally reveals the undercurrent of antagonism which had only been suggested in the first act. When the disguised Portia asks Antonio if he has anything to say, Antonio addresses Bassanio near the end of his speech:

> Commend me to your honorable wife,
> Tell her the process of Antonio's end,

Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death;
And when the tale is told, bid her be judge
Whether Bassanio had not once a love.
Repent but you that you shall lose your friend,
And he repents not that he pays your debt;
(IV.i.273-279)

Responding to this appeal, Bassanio then bends to the claims of the male bond, violating his troth to Portia as he answers:

Antonio, I am married to a wife
Which is as dear to me as life itself.
But life itself, my wife, and all the world,
Are not with me esteem'd above thy life.
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
Here to this devil, to deliver you.
(IV.i.282-287)

In time of stress, here the male bond proves stronger than the recently pledged marital bond. Portia's ironic aside, "Your wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you make the offer," reminds the audience of an opposing feminine claim. And after Portia has used her nimble wit to free Antonio from the clutches of Shylock by carrying his legalism to its conclusion, a second testing of Bassanio occurs as the disguised Portia asks for the one thing Bassanio had promised never to part with—her ring. Against Bassanio's protests, Antonio steps in with the claim of male friendship having priority over that of heterosexual love. "My dear Bassanio," he begins,

let him have the ring.
Let his deservings and my love withal
Be valued 'gainst your wive's commandement.
(IV.i.449-451)

Thus prodded, Bassanio reluctantly gives up the ring; again the brotherly bond proves stronger.

The resolution of this conflict occurs in Belmont, where the idyllic setting is subtly juxtaposed with the appearance of Lorenzo and Jessica who talk of Troilus, Thisby, Dido, and Medea, suggesting variations on the theme of unfaithful or ill-

fated love. When Portia, now out of disguise, welcomes Bassanio, he responds by introducing Antonio, a new-comer to Belmont.

In welcoming Antonio, Portia includes him not only in her home, but accepts the brotherly bond already established between Bassanio and Antonio. Unlike Antonio, who has set up a rivalry between the sexes, Portia recognizes the claim of male friendship, yet she goes about instructing both men that, with marriage, a still higher claim is that between husband and wife. Thus while playfully rueing the loss of her ring, which Bassanio, in fact, gave to her as the disguised Doctor of Laws, she sets up a duplicate of the courtroom scene, in which Bassanio asks for mercy, and Antonio offers once again to save his male friend.

The climax of this scene comes when Antonio gives Bassanio the ring which Portia has handed him, and says, "Here, Lord Bassanio, swear to keep this ring." What Antonio in effect is declaring is that the claims of marriage transcend the claims of brotherly love. When Portia unravels the story of her disguise, she then addresses the man who has played the role of her rival:

> Antonio, you are welcome,
> And I have better news in store for you
> Than you expect. Unseal this letter soon;
> There you shall find three of your argosies
> Are richly come to harbor suddenly.
> (V.i.273-277)

Portia has "saved" Antonio twice—once in court; now in Belmont. She includes him in the happy, if ironical, resolution at her house, but Shakespeare excludes him from the merry band of couples; in a different way from Shylock, Antonio nevertheless stands alone at the play's end. There is a touch of sadness in Antonio's fate as he is, in effect, left at the end where he began, even after hazarding his life for his friend. W. H. Auden comments:

> In a production of the play, a stage director is faced with the awkward problem of what to do with Antonio in the last act. Shylock, the villain, has been vanquished and will trouble Arcadia no more, but, now that

> Bassanio is getting married, Antonio, the real hero of the play, has no further dramatic function. According to the Arden edition, when Alan McKinnon produced the play at the Garrick Theatre in 1905, he had Antonio and Bassanio hold the stage at the final curtain, but I cannot picture Portia, who is certainly no Victorian doormat of a wife, allowing her bridegroom to let her enter the house by herself. If Antonio is not to fade away into a nonentity, then the married couples must enter the lighted house and leave Antonio standing alone on the darkened stage, outside the Eden from which, not by the choice of others, but by his own nature, he is excluded.[4]

While separated from the list of couples who romp about with merry banter, Antonio's final words link him to the title of the play—

> Sweet lady, you have given me life and living,
> For here I read for certain that my ships
> Are safely come to road.
> (V.i.286-87)

In worldly terms, Antonio's end is not so sad at all. He will survive, but unlike Bassanio and Portia, he does not know the spiritual transcendence that is theirs to share. He is ultimately the merchant of Venice—they are inhabitants of Belmont. Of this special place, Anne Barton says:

> Most of Shakespeare's comedies involve, at some point, a journey to a place where life is heightened, of an extraordinary quality. Belmont is a locality of this kind. Portia's house lies in an indeterminate place reached across the sea, among trees and lawns and under an open sky. With its music and its riddle-game out of the past, its possession of the kind of limitless, inexplicable wealth proper to fairy-tale, it forms an obvious contrast with the crowded, urban world of Venice where money is a commodity to be counted and painfully earned. There is a sense, however, in which Belmont is really the better self of Venice: a world of clarity, order, and materialism transfigured, presided over by a lady in whom the virtues characteristic of the Christians in the comedy manifest themselves in their most complete and realized form (252).

In or out of her disguise, Portia is allowed to manifest herself in her "most complete and realized form" as well. She is one of the happy deviations: woman as actor, equal, and friend.

In *As You Like It* Rosalind emerges as another merry deviation from the traditional role of woman when she is driven to adopt the disguise in order to flee from the usurper Duke Frederick because, in his words,

> She is too subtile . . . and her smoothness,
> Her very silence, and her patience
> Speak to the people, and they pity her.
> (I.iii.77-79)

Of the disguise, she asks her devoted friend Celia, the Duke's daughter,

> Were it not better,
> Because that I am more than common tall,
> That I did suit me all points like a man?
> A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,
> A boar-spear in my hand, and—in my heart
> Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will—
> We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
> As many other mannish cowards have
> That do outface it with their semblances.
> (I.iii.114-122)

Rosalind appears to delight in the disguise, and ends on the joyous note—"No go (we in) content / To liberty, and not to banishment." And liberty she has—to play the page, to observe and mock the romantic posing of her true-love Orlando, to ridicule Phoebe's equally romantic and more ridiculous stance of an aloof mistress to Silvius, and to effect a happy resolution in arranging appropriate marriages for all when she declares that she will love "no woman."

As she is liberated by her disguise, so, too, at the play's end, is she an independent woman who, instead of being given in marriage, gives herself to those she loves. To her father, and then to Orlando, she says:

> To you I give myself, for I am yours,
> I'll have no father, if you be not he;
> I'll have no husband, if you be not he;
> Nor ne'er wed woman, if you be not she.
> (V.iv.114-117)

It is Rosalind, disguised as Ganymed, whom Shakespeare allows to be the most active agent in the play. In disguise, she is the most undisguised spokesman for clear-sightedness. For Anne Barton in her introduction to the play in *The Riverside Shakespeare,*

> Rosalind is extraordinarily important in *As You Like It,* as central and dominating a figure in her fashion as Hamlet is in his own, very different play, because in her these warring opposites are reconciled and live at peace without for an instant losing their force or individuality. . . . Life is at best imperfect, even in Arden, but Rosalind suggests that there are ways of living it well and to some purpose, despite the pessimism of Jaques. This is why she matters so much in the play, and why the resolution of the plot, such as it is, is placed almost entirely in her hands (366).

It is no mere coincidence that, in the comedies, Shakespeare allows his heroines to assume a disguise. By so doing, he frees them from the plight of the conventional heroine, and allows them to act with some degree of autonomy. In her essay "*As You Like It,*" Helen Gardner summarizes Suzanne Langer's definition of comedy which seems especially appropriate in this context. It is "that the essence of comedy is that it embodies in symbolic form our sense of happiness in feeling that we can meet and master the changes and chances of life as it confronts us."[5]

And this is precisely what Rosalind is able to do, and what most heroines outside of the comedies were not: "to meet and master the changes and chances of life." H. B. Charlton states his case in favor of the heroines of comedy as follows:

> Shakespeare's enthronement of woman as queen of comedy is no mere accident, and no mere gesture of conventional gallantry. Because they are women, these heroines have attributes of personality fitting them more certainly than men to shape the world towards happiness. His menfolk, a Hamlet or a Macbeth or an Othello, may have a subtler intellect, a more penetrating imagination, or a more irresistible passion. But what they have more largely in one kind of personal endowment, they own only at the expense of other properties no less essential to the encountering of such varied circumstances as are presented by the act of living. These heroes, in effect, are out of harmony with themselves, and so are fraught with the certainty of tragic doom. Their personality is a mass of mighty forces out of equipoise: they lack the balance of a durable spiritual organism. It was in women that Shakespeare found

> this equipoise, this balance which makes personality in action a sort of ordered interplay of the major components of human nature.[6]

And it is through the disguise that Shakespeare's women are finally afforded some kind of equality in the comedies. The high incidence of heroines in the comedies can be correlated with the fact that they are in disguise, and therefore able to act freely as individual entities rather than as victims of sexual stereotyping. But ultimately even the disguise can cause problems. Even with the disguise, the central question of the position of woman in a male world has not been solved. For a more touching, even troubling, comment on the disguise, we must turn to *Twelfth Night.*

Here the disguise which Viola adopts is complicated by the fact that she is the twin sister of Sebastian, thus creating confusion when Olivia mistakes Viola, disguised as Cesario, for him. But long before this scene, Viola must play the page for Duke Orsino, the man she loves, and must relay the Duke's messages of love to Olivia, an awkward situation at best, and complicated by the fact that Olivia favors Cesario. The resolution occurs when the lost brother Sebastian reappears and serves as a suitable mate for Olivia, resembling as he does Cesario, and the Duke's disappointment is assuaged by the revelation that Cesario is, in fact, a girl, and his male loyalty to Cesario is transferred to the woman, Viola.

Viewed in outline form, the play appears as merry a one as *As You Like It.* But it is not. Its tone is more wistful, the position of Viola less secure. Indeed, in her paradoxical role as page, we find echoes of what it is like to be a woman (played by a boy) beneath the disguise. Commenting on the difficulty of the disguise, Viola says:

> Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
> Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
> How easy is it for the proper-false
> In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
> Alas, (our) frailty is the cause, not we,
> For such as we are made (of,) such we be.
> How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
> And I (poor monster) fond as much on him;
> And she (mistaken) seems to dote on me.
> What will become of this? As I am man,

My state is desperate for my master's love;
As I am woman (now alas the day!),
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
O time, thou must untangle this, not I,
It is too hard a knot for me t' untie.
(II.ii.27-41)

Thus, for a time, Viola's disguise as Cesario creates more problems than it cures. The effect is comical when Olivia dotes upon Cesario, painful when Cesario must act as page for the Duke, the man she loves. The pathos of woman's position is even more clearly seen in Cesario's exchange with the Duke in Act Two, scene four. Self-absorbed in his own romantic entanglement with the recalcitrant Olivia, Duke Orsino underestimates the strength of woman's passion and fidelity when he says,

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much; they lack retention.
Alas, their love may be call'd appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,
That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt,
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much. Make no compare
Between what love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.
(II.iv.93-102)

Dramatic irony ensues as Viola answers:

Ay, but I know—
Too well what love women to men may owe;
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.
(II.iv.103-108)

The Duke then asks, "And what's her history?"

A blank, my lord; she never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate like Patience on a monument,

Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more, swear more, but indeed
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love.
(II.iv.93-118)

The image of the patient woman might be taken as a cameo-like emblem for the conventional woman in Elizabethan thought: submissive, silent, and sad. It is but a passing image, yet poignant in its projection of a woman lamenting her inability to act directly. In Viola we find a creature caught in two worlds; for her the disguise is not so much a liberating force as it was for Rosalind, but an additional dilemma. And although Viola ends with the man she loves, after the revelation of her true identity, and the Duke bids:

Cesario, come—
For so you shall be while you are a man;
And when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.
(V.i.385-388)

the remembrance of images past conjures up a fragmented portrait of woman in man's clothes. Ultimately Viola sees herself more as a kind of curiosity than a composite woman.

For a last look at how Shakespeare used the device of the disguise, let us turn to that late play, *Cymbeline* (1609-10), which treats both the disguise and man's distrust of woman. Here the details of the disguise grow grotesque as when Imogen, disguised as Fidele (a name of obvious significance), falls upon the headless body of Cloten, her would-be rapist, whom she believes to be her beloved, if gullible husband, Posthumus, who has heeded the Iago-like insinuations of the villainous Jachimo against her. In this play all of the concerns of this study coalesce: the defiance of a dutiful daughter; the suspicions of a jealous husband; and the donning of the disguise which saves Imogen from imminent danger.

In the opening scene, in the garden of the British King, Cymbeline, the First Gentleman answers the query, "But what's the matter?" with a summary of the initial conflict:

His daughter, and the heir of 's kingdom, whom
He purpos'd to his wife's sole son—a widow

That late he married—hath referr'd herself
Unto a poor but worthy gentleman: she's wedded;
Her husband banish'd; she imprison'd: all
Is outward sorrow; though I think the king
Be touch'd at very heart.
(I.i.4-9)

Once again we have the case of the outwardly disobedient daughter introduced initially as in *Othello*. "Will chaos come again?" might be the accompanying question, as Imogen and Posthumus swear plights of mutual fidelity. The pattern is now as familiar as the paternal figure Cymbeline who upbraids his daughter in a somewhat shortened version of the patriarch's curse: "O disloyal thing / That shouldst repair my youth, thou heap'st / A year's age on me." Posthumus is banished in the hope that his daughter will renounce her husband and marry the King's appointed, Cloten, his loutish oaf of a step-son. In light of prior plays, the prospects are not propituous for the young maiden.

To make matters worse, an Iago figure appears in the character of Jachimo who wagers that he can seduce Posthumus' seemingly virtuous bride.[7] Emerging from a casket in Imogen's room at night, the villain steals a bracelet from Imogen's wrist and observes a small mole on her breast in order to later convince Posthumus that he has enjoyed her embrace. Against the counsel of objective observers, Posthumus then delivers the husband's curse upon Imogen:

Let there be no honour
Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance; love
Where there's another man: the vows of women
Of no more bondage be, to where they are made,
Than they are to their virtues; which is nothing.
O, above measure false!
(II.v.108-113)

All this is patently familiar; the question is, what is new? How does Shakespeare, in the world of romance, resolve these tragic elements so that, at the end, all the principals survive and are reunited?

For one thing, Imogen adopts the disguise of a boy and is thereby removed from the threats of Posthumus and enters

into a brotherhood with her lost, true brothers in the wilds of Wales. In disguise, she is protected, too, from the villainous attack of Cloten, who vows he will

> ravish her; first kill him and in her eyes; there shall she see my valour, which will then be a torment to her contempt. He (Posthumus) on the ground, my speech of insultment ended on his dead body, and when my lust hath dined,—which, as I say, to vex her I will execute in the clothes that she so praised,—to the court I'll knock her back, foot her home again. She hath despised me rejoicingly, and I'll be merry in my revenge.
>
> (III.v.142-150)

So much for the King's appointed. He is soon to be slain by the King's rightful heir, one of his lost sons named Guiderius. The sight of Cloten's headless body is to serve to complicate the levels of mistaken identity, for Imogen believes him to be her husband, Posthumus, clothed as he is in her husband's attire. When asked her name by a Roman soldier who finds her, Imogen fittingly replies, "Fidele," Latin for "faithful." The patient Griselda figure lives on, though disguised. In his introduction to the play in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Hallett Smith comments on Imogen's role as follows:

> . . . the neglect of the hero means more attention to the heroine, and nineteenth-century critics who could not abide the play fell in love with Imogen. She is one of Shakespeare's good women, loving and faithful, patient to an almost incredible degree, but sharp at seeing the flaws in a seducer's arguments and vigorous in defense of the dignity of a princess. Yet she wistfully notes how tired she gets on her way to Milford, and she swears pretty feminine oaths like "Od's pittikins.' The name she adopts in her disguise as a page, Fidele, is the true emblem of her character (p. 1519).

In Act Five the unraveling of all this confusion takes place as Jachimo confesses that he has "belied a lady" and at her death the wicked Queen confesses her lack of love for Cymbeline. Believing that he has had Imogen murdered, Posthumus be wails his fate, and in a touch of dramatic irony, strikes the page who stands before him, who is Imogen in disguise. After Imogen has revealed her true identity, the patriarch delivers the justly deserved, if belated, blessing on the pair and rightful order is restored, both in the lives of the principals and in the

country as a whole. Posthumus gains stature as the son of the dead, noble Leonatus, and is thereby accepted as a social equal.

But questions remain. How is one to resolve Cymbeline's obviously poor judgment in appointing Cloten as a prospective husband over Posthumus? Further, how are we to reconcile the loutish Cloten's traditional voicing of due obedience, when to Imogen he says:

> You sin against
> Obedience, which you owe your father. For
> the contract you pretend with the base wretch
> One bred of alms and foster'd with cold dishes,
> With scraps o' th' court, it is no contract, none:
> (II.iii.117-120)

It appears that here, as elsewhere, Shakespeare is positing a delicate balance between obedience and defiance. In the end, Imogen has made the right choice, although for a time one thinks her father is correct when the deceived husband, Posthumus, sets out to have her killed.

What saves Imogen in this case is not so much a fairy-like setting, as the fact that she has temporarily escaped the machinations of the male world by the device of the disguise. Without it, she would have suffered death or ravishment. The disguise functions as Imogen's *dea ex machina*.

While the disguise may shield Imogen from obvious attack on her sex, however, we recall other verbal ones. The ghosts of male abuse remain as when, after absorbing Jachimo's insinuations against his wife, and once alone, Posthumus is made to rail:

> Is there no way for men to be but women
> Must be half-workers? We are all bastards;
> And the most venerable man which I
> Did call my father, was I know not where
> When I was stamp'd; some coiner with his tools
> Made me a counterfeit: yet my mother seem'd
> The Dian of that time: so doth my wife
> The nonpareil of this. O, vengeance, vengeance!
> (II.v.1-8)

In this late play we are momentarily back where we started. Ultimately the disguise offers flimsy protection from such abuse, although it stopped, for a time, man's attack upon woman. The time has come to end it altogether.

Notes

1 John Dover Wilson, *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962), 161.

2 R. Warwick Bond, *Early Plays from the Italian* (1911; rpt. New York: Benjamin Bloom), xxxix-xl).

3 Craig, *Works of Shakespeare*, 504.

4 W. H. Auden, "Belmont and Venice," in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), 234.

5 Helen Gardner, "*As You Like It,*" in *More Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. John Garrett (London: Longmans, Green, 1959), 17-32.

6 H. B. Charlton, *Shakespearian Comedy* (1938; rpt. London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 285-6. Charlton says further that "Perhaps it was primarily because Shakespeare found women more sensitive to intuition and more responsive to emotion that he first promoted them to dominion in the realm of comedy. He found, moreover, in their instincts a kind of finely developed mother-wit, a variety of humanized common sense which, because it was impregnated with humane feeling, was more apt to lay hold of the essential realities of existence than was the more rarified and isolated intellect of man" (286).

7 In his introduction to the play in *The Riverside* Shakespeare, Hallett Smith comments on the literary roots of the wager. "The first dramatic development in *Cymbeline*, after the banishment of Posthumus, is the wager on the question of Imogen's fidelity to her husband. This popular motif, widespread in medieval literature, is best known as the ninth story of the second day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. No English translation was available to Shakespeare, but he could have read the tale in French rendering, if not in Italina; he certainly read the English translation of a German version of it called *Frederick of Jennen*. Modern critics have often found the situation a distasteful one, for as W. W. Lawrence says, 'Nowadays we feel that to give a villain a chance to attempt to seduce one's wife, for the sake of proving to him and to others her unassailable chastity, would be the height of folly, and of cruelty to her. But the Middle Ages thought otherwise; they believed that virtue exaggerated, as it seems to us, beyond reason, was a virtue magnified.' Accordingly, the character of Posthumus should be viewed in a chivalric context, and his behavior, up to the time he is deceived by the villain Jachimo, considered fully worthy of the high reputation he enjoys in Britain and abroad" (1518). Perhaps, but I think, as I have

attempted to show, that Shakespeare is questioning this tradition of testing women and succeeds in pointing out man's cruelty towards her. He was, after all, writing in the Renaissance, not the Middle Ages.

Epilogue

The question again comes to mind—why Shakespeare's repeated interest in showing women falsely accused by the men about them? *Cymbeline* is not the last play to treat this theme; in addition to *The Winter's Tale, Pericles* contrasts Miranda's virgin innocence with a brothel, and in *Henry VIII*, believed by many critics to bear the last traces of Shakespeare's hand, Katherine appears as a saintly, maligned lady, and the final accolade falls not to Henry, but to Elizabeth, whose birth the final scene celebrates. Why does not Shakespeare tire of Patient Griseldas; is he trying to say something deeper about the fate of woman in a world ruled by men?

Like Barbara Everett, who focuses her attention on the role of women characters in Shakespeare's comedies,

> my intention has not been to present Shakespeare as an earnest—though early—leader of the feminist movement, but only to suggest the development . . . of certain feelings and attitudes which are a constituent part of the plays as a whole, but which do tend to be most clearly expressed through the women in them. . . . The expression of humane principle, of generous and constant feeling, comes principally from the women—whether we choose to see them as symbols merely of an area of the mind possessed by both sexes in common, or whether we see Shakespeare creating a world in which some kind of distinctively female rationale is able to have full play, and to dominate the action."[1]

"Some distinctively female rationale," some, for want of a better term, feminine principle, does seem vying for recognition in Shakespeare's work. To suggest that the idea bloomed in the comedies may seem too flowery; let us say it took root there. And somewhere out of the fertility of the creative process, a sprout of an idea kept growing. It was this: church and society have sanctioned the authority of man; what of the authority of woman? It is a question that Chaucer's Wife of Bath asked earlier, as her last husband threw at her his tattered edition of Jerome's anti-feminist writings and made her

deaf. But Shakespeare's women, neither deaf nor dumb, are among his most brilliant creations. We use the term "a Renaissance man" to describe a man of many talents; what of "the Renaissance woman"? No such term is applied in the same manner, but does that mean that she does not exist?

In an attempt to categorize Shakespeare's women characters, D. S. Brewer suggests that

> Shakespeare's heroines may be roughly divided into two types, the independent, princessly young women who take positive action, like Rosalind; and the very young, helpless, innocent, like Perdita, and, above all, Miranda. It is not unreasonable to see here the two main types of heroine; one, the 'modern,' a woman fertile in resource and response, something of a help-meet (rather like Milton's Eve, a ripe woman); the other, the 'medieval' heroine, who is, even in her physical charm, a very young girl. The childlike innocence, gaiety, and helplessness of the 'medieval' heroine calls forth a response far different from that aroused by the 'modern' heroine. The early heroine is not an equal, not a mate. She is above her worshipers and yet, in a sense, because she is passive and needs protection, she is inferior to them. Child and divinity, she links in us two sets of feelings less often combined in later literature, the feelings both of Prospero and Ferdinand. The desire to cherish and protect, the desire to reverence and worship.[2]

Although there may be some validity in making such a distinction between the active and passive heroine in Elizabethan Drama, it would seem that ultimately no simple definition of the Renaissance Woman will hold. There should be multiple resonances with the mention of the term, as there is for the masculine counterpart. Women, too, as Shakespeare saw, could defy easy classification and could emerge as individuals —are Regan and Goneril and Cordelia active or passive or individuals? Such categorization cracks under Shakespeare's creativity, as does the code which sought to control all women by fitting them into sexual stereotypes.

Similarly, when speaking of the historical women in the Tudor period in *The Wives of Henry VIII*, Lady Antonia Fraser concludes:

> It is seductive to regard the six wives of Henry VIII as a series of feminine stereotypes, women as tarot cards. Thus Catherine of Aragon becomes The Betrayed Wife, Anne Boleyn is The Temptres, Jane Seymour The Good Woman; Anna of Cleves is The Ugly Sister, Katherine

> Howard The Bad Girl; finally Catherine Parr is The Mother Figure...There are elements of truth, of course, in all of these evocative descriptions, yet each one of them ignores the complexity and variety in the individual character. In their different ways, and for different reasons, nearly all these women were victims, but they were not willing victims. On the contrary, a remarkably high level of strength, and also of intelligence, was displayed by them at a time when their sex traditionally possessed little of either.[3]

One woman character remains who defied not only all categorization, and the masculine control of Rome, but all description, and, in her infinite variety, embodied the feminine principle which was given equal authority: Cleopatra.

In his scholarly, "The Elizabethans' *Antony and Cleopatra*, Franklin M. Dickey presents the conventional Elizabethan attitude towards Antony and Cleopatra, suggesting that they were viewed as moral exempla against lust. Mr. Dickey's comments are so instructive that I shall quote them at some length.

> The Elizabethan reader of English, French, or Latin would have found almost unanimous authority from classical times to his own day condemning the lovers for their 'lustis foul & abhominable'. Popular books of moral philosophy and the equally popular commonplace books cite them regularly as examples of extravagant behavior. Poets from the anonymous author of *The Fable of Ovid treting of Narcissus* (1560) to Spenser take similar views. In book 1 of the *Faerie Queene* the lovers are Lucifera's captives, exemplifying those who 'Through wastfull Pride, and wanton Riotise' are condemned 'to live in woe, & die in wretchedness' (I v 46). Cleopatra shares her dungeon with licentious Semiramis and the Amazon Sthenoboea—'Proud wemen, vaine, forgetfull of their yoke' (I v 50). In book V, devoted to the allegory of Justice, Artegal, forced to wear women's clothes and spin, is one with Samson, Hercules, and Antony, heroes who could not be conquered by strong men made effeminate by 'beauties louely batie':
>
> that doth procure
> Great warriours oft their rigour to represse,
> And mighty hands forget their manlinesse . . .
> And so did warlike *Antony* neglect
> The worlds whole rule for *Cleopatras* sight.
> (V viii 1-2)
>
> The aspiring reader who turned to Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Courtier* (1560) would have found Cleopatra among queens who 'gave themselves to all their appetite' (p. 248). Or if he knew his Montaigne (1603) or his Burton (1621) or any of a long list stretching from the middle of the sixteenth to well into the seventeenth century,

> he would have recognized the lovers as examples of the destruction caused by profligacy. Nowhere does an author hint that their love enriched and ennobled their lives.[3]

Nowhere, one might add, except in Shakespeare. Ultimately, however, Dickey sees Shakespeare's pair as embodying the "*contemptus mundi* which other playwrights preach in vain" and says that we are left in "awe at the sight of the most glittering world conceivable lying in ruins" (156).

To attempt to defend Cleopatra in light of such scholarly evidence to the contrary may appear foolhardy, but I contend that here, as elsewhere, Shakespeare was no conventional moralist, and that in Shakespeare's hands the blackened name of Cleopatra becomes one of beaten gold, something finer than it was before.

Shakespeare, after all, had one great precedent for his conception of Cleopatra. One might turn to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, in which he begins with the story of Cleopatra, as an earlier example of the conversion of the conventionally evil woman into a martyred saint of love.

After a witty introduction in which Cupid or the God of Love chastizes Chaucer for defaming women in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Romance of the Rose*, he then goes on to sentence the author to the following act of penitence:

> Thou shalt, whil that thow livest, yer by yere,
> The moste partye of thy tyme spende
> In makynge of a gloryous legende
> Of goode women, maydenes and wyves,
> That were trewe in lovynge al here lyves;
> And telle of false men that hem betrayen,
> That al here lyf ne don nat but assayen
> How manye wemen they may don a shame;
> For in youre world that is now holden game.
> And thogh the lestest nat a lovere be,
> Spek wel of love; this penaunce yeve I thee.[4]

Chaucer then begins *The Legend of Good Women* with "The Legend of Cleopatra," and after the death of Antony, in a particularly vivid scene, she enters a pit of serpents, where she is bitten and dies. Chaucer gives her this final speech:

Now, love, to whom my sorweful herete obeyde
So ferforthly that from that blisful houre
That I yow swor to ben al frely youre—
I mene yow, Antonius, my knyght—
That never wakynge, in the day or nyght,
Ye nere out of myn hertes remembraunce,
For wel or wo, for carole or for daunce;
And in myself this covenaunt made I tho,
That ryght swich as Ye felten, wel or wo,
As fer forth, as it is my power lay,
Unreprovable unto my wfyhod ay,
The same wolde I fele, lyf or deth,—
And thilke covenaunt, whil me leasteth breth,
I wol fulfille; and that shal ben wel sene,
Was nevere unto hire love a trewer quene.
(lines 680-695 in Robinson)

The narrative concludes:

And with that word, naked, with ful good herte,
Among the serpents in the pit she sterte,
And there she ches to have hire buryinge.
Anon the nadderes gonne hire for to stynge,
And she hire deth receyveth with good cheere,
For love of Antony that was hire so dere.
(lines 696-701 in Robinson)

In a footnote to the lines describing Cleopatra's death in the snake pit, F. N. Robinson says, "Many of these instances occur in the lives of saints, and Chaucer, as Dr. Griffith suggests, may have been led to think of them by his representation of Cleopatra as martyr" (848). If so, this reinforces Chaucer's view of Cleopatra as a martyr to love. When Franklin Dickey somewhat reluctantly admits that "Chaucer speaks only for a very small minority of those who from classical times to the end of the seventeenth century wrote of the fatal love which cost Antony and Cleopatra their thrones and their lives. . . . Save for Chaucer's, most of the medieval Cleopatras are very wicked indeed" (144; 147), he seems unwilling to admit a possible correlation between Chaucer's and Shakespeare's treatment of the conventionally evil woman turned good.

Could one reason be that the lesser authors (Dickey mentions Lydgate among others) were literal and simplistic in their interpretation, tending more towards moralistic disap-

proval, whereas both Chaucer and Shakespeare could see beyond the strict stereotypes of good and evil women in order to create a more complex characterization of Cleopatra, which amounted to a reversal of the stereotype? If birds of a feather flock together, so do great minds.

The first references to Cleopatra in Shakespeare's play certainly fit the conventionally denigrating image, however, and the familiar refrain of a wicked woman who has ruined a heroic man is voiced by Philo in the opening lines:

> Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart
> Which in the scuffles of great flights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust.
> Look where they come!
> Take but good note, and you shall see in him
> The triple pillar of the world transform'd
> Into a strumpet's fool.
> (I.i.1-13)

And that is exactly what we do see: Cleopatra controlling Antony with her feminine wiles. "If it be love indeed, tell me how much," Cleopatra asks Antony. It would seem that even she does not know how to define the nature of their relationship. Within this framework of uncertain love, Cleopatra mentions Fulvia, Antony's wife, four times in sixteen lines, setting up a feminine rivalry between the authority of the lawful wife and that of unlawful passion (if, that is, either may be said to have authority).

When later told that Fulvia is dead, Cleopatra's comment is filled with sarcasm: "Can Fulvia die?" she asks in astonishment and mockery. The continued rivalry is startling and her irony paints a portrait of a wily wilful woman who at the outset captures our interest, if not our admiration. She is the consummate actress, mercurial, and in control. "I have seen her die twenty times," Enobarbus says, and this allusion to her

overly dramatic ways sets the hummingbird flight of her actions and her tongue.

Cleopatra's women are also unlikely candidates for inclusion in a defence of good women. Surprisingly, even shockingly, they chatter about cuckoldry, which has hitherto been the province of male concern. The word is repeated several times in an exchange between Charmian and Iras, and their conversation has obvious sexual innuendoes. The effect achieved is an atmosphere of licentiousness and luxuriousness which is quite removed from the Roman virtues of austerity and restraint, which Philo represents in the opening scene. It would seem that Antony, the heroic Mars figure, is ensnared in a nest of vipers and vamps.

Yet paradoxically it is Cleopatra who dictates that he go to Rome, and Antony's equivocal reply:

> That thou residing here, goes yet with me;
> And I hence fleeting, here remain with thee.

describes his wish to remain. Octavius' comment that Antony

> is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolomy
> More womanly than he;

sets up an inversion of sexually ordained roles, and further reinforces the soldiers stance against the pair. Octavius apostrophizes Antony to recall the time when

> On the Alps
> It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
> Which some did die to look on; and all this
> (It wounds thine honor that I speak it now)
> Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek
> So much as lank'd not.
> (I.iv.66-71)

But immediately following this scene in Rome comes one in Alexandria where Cleopatra paints an even grander heroic image of Antony when to Charmian she says:

> Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he?
> Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse?

O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!
Do bravely, horse, for wot'st thou whom thou mov'st?
The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm
And burgonet of men.
(I.iv.19-24)

In highly individualistic strokes, Cleopatra presents an alternate view of Antony. Later she recalls him as her "man of men" and amplifies her image of Antony as a supreme lover, as opposed to Octavius' image of him as a supreme soldier. And just as the audience's sympathies begin to soften, Shakespeare shifts the scene again, now to Messina, where Pompey presents a shattering picture of the no longer youthful queen, and, in effect, delivers a curse on both lovers:

But all the charms of love,
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy wan'd lip!
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both,
Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming; epicurean cooks
Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honor,
Even till a Lethe'd dullness—
(II.i.19-26).

In short, Pompey wants Antony unmanned by Cleopatra and this is exactly what Acts One through Four present: a manly hero so uxorious that he follows a woman in sea battle and, like Othello, later laments that his occupation is gone. Although there is a momentary revival of his heroic strength in Act Four, and even Cleopatra attempts to help him with his armor, thus endorsing his heroic role, he blames a second defeat on her rather gratuitously, and joins in the earlier male chorus of epithets against her—"Triple-turn'd whore!" "gypsy" and ends with a general defamation:

Let him [Octavius] take thee
And hoist thee up to the shouting plebians!
Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot
Of all thy sex; most monster-like, be shown
For poor'st diminutives, for dolts, and let
Patient Octavia plough thy visage up
With her prepared nails.
(IV.xii.33-39)

"If this be love indeed?" might well be the accompanying question addressed to Antony as his incrimination reminds one of the enraged husband. Antony's concluding statement,

> The witch shall die.
> To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall
> Under this plot. She dies for't.
> (IV.xii.47-49)

proves a bit premature, however. For it is Antony who will die at the end of Act Four of his own self-inflicted wounds, prompted by one final betrayal of Cleopatra who sends him a false message that she is dead. In believing her, Antony reveals himself as the literal actor—he acts impulsively, almost without thinking. Cleopatra, on the other hand, is an actress in a figurative sense—she "acts" at feigning death, and we recall Enobarbus' words, "I have seen her dying twenty times."

Antony never understood Cleopatra's acting ability either in regard to her feigning affection for Caesar before Thidius, whom Caesar has sent and who sends Antony into a jealous rage, or here as he lies dying.

Even at Antony's death at the monument Cleopatra upstages Antony, both with her equivocation—"I dare not, dear—Dear my lord, pardon—I dare not lest I be taken"—to his request for a final kiss, and in her magnificent speech lamenting his death:

> Young boys and girls
> Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
> And there is nothing left remarkable
> Beneath the visiting moon.
> (IV.xv.65-68)

It would seem that the weight of the conventional Elizabethan tradition against Cleopatra is realized in this scene as Antony, once akin to Hercules, lies dead at her feet. In an inversion of the typical pattern, the male character lies dead, destroyed by the female. If Shakespeare had ended here, he would have joined the conventional Elizabethan stance against Cleopatra. That he does not, and further, that he reserves the last act for his heroine, suggests a transcendence which makes his Cleopatra magnificent, others mundane.

In preparation for this altered conception, and after Cleopatra temporarily swoons at Antony's death, Shakespeare allows a glimpse into what is essentially a changed character when Cleopatra says:

> No more but [e'en] a woman, and commanded
> By such poor passion as the maid that milks
> And does the meanest chores.
> (IV.xv.73-75)

In envisioning herself as a milkmaid, an emblem of innocence in seventeenth century commonplace books,[5] Shakespeare has introduced an image of the "good woman." From now to the play's conclusion we shall see a woman who once saw herself "with Phoebus' amorous pinches black and wrinkl'd with time" and whom others saw as a strumpet, transformed into "A lass unparallel'd."

The paradoxical nature of her character has been foreshadowed by Enobarbus:

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish.
> (II.ii.233-238)

Next to her, the conventionally good Octavia pales by comparison, as out of something conventionally evil, Shakespeare creates a goddess, a woman of equal authority, who, by her association with Isis, defies Octavius, the god of Rome, and joins her "husband" Antony in death.

Like Hamlet, Cleopatra comes to terms with a mature self when she realizes that death is imminent. "Let's do't after the high Roman fashion," she tells her women at the end of Act Four, thus revealing her resolution to choose death rather than enslavement by Caesar. When we see her again in Act Five, scene two, she expands upon her wish to die rather than to be a servant of Caesar, and mocks Caesar's authority which she sees as temporal, not eternal:

'Tis paltry to be Caesar;
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.
(V.ii.1-8)

When Proculeius enters and sophistically counsels Cleopatra:

Let me report to him
Your sweet dependancy, and you shall find
A conqueror that will pray in aid for kindness
Where he for grace is kneel'd to.

Cleopatra equally sophistically replies:

I hourly learn
A doctrine of obedience, and would gladly
Look him i' th' face.

Her "doctrine of obedience," however, is not to Caesar, but to her lord Antony whom she will join in death. Her defiance of Caesar's will is openly displayed when Roman soldiers surround her and, in a fury, she retorts with a vividly imagistic speech:

Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court,
Nor once be chastis'd with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up,
And show me to the shouting valotry
Of censoring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! rather make
My country's high pyramides my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains.
(V.ii.52-62)

Here not only is Cleopatra contrasted to the "dull Octavia," but more importantly, Egypt is contrasted with Rome. As disturbing as the images are, an alternate allegiance is made clear. Out of the serpent-infested Nile, a new authority is

born: Egypt will be equal to Rome; Cleopatra, associated with Isis, equal to Octavius.

Next to the conventional advice of the conceited Dolabella, Cleopatra's speeches blaze with a grandeur which lift her to her rightful place as queen. And it is not the speeches of men that make Antony's memory heroic, but Cleopatra's.

> His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm
> Crested the world, his voice was propertied
> As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
> But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
> He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
> There was no winter in't; an [autumn] it was
> That grew the more by reaping. His delights
> Were dolphin-like, they show'd his back above
> The element they liv'd in. In his livery
> Walk'd crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
> As plates dropp'd from his pocket.
> (V.ii.82-92)

Dolabella cannot imagine such a man; Cleopatra could. Shakespeare then deliberately undercuts this moment of majesty with Caesar's insult as, upon entering the monument, he asks, "Which is the Queen of Egypt?" And insult is met with insult as an unkneeling Cleopatra is reminded by Dolabella, "It is the Emperor, Madam." What follows is a remarkable exchange in which the arch actress adopts a masterfully ironical stance. After projecting a speech of supreme poetry, she now adopts a conventionally subservient stance, saying to Caesar,

> Sole sir o' th' world,
> I cannot project mine own cause so well
> To make it clear, but do confess I have
> Been laden with like frailties which before
> Have often sham'd our sex.
> (V.ii.120-123)

From beginning to end, this speech is laden with multiple ironies. After her encomium of Antony, "sole sir o' th' world," seems hardly fitting, and her coy inclusion as a representative of Eve is clearly meant to only appease another man, even a Caesar, whom she will control, rather than be controlled by.

Octavius answers with a rather arrogant stance which denies her autonomy:

> Cleopatra, know
> We will extenuate rather than enforce.
> If you apply yourself to our intents
> Which towards you are most gentle, you shall find
> A benefit in this change; but if you seek
> To lay on me a cruelty, by taking
> Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself
> Of my good purpose, and put your children
> To that destruction which I'll guard them from
> If thereon you rely.
> (V.ii.124-133)

At his leave-taking, Cleopatra accurately defines Octavius' stance:

> He words me girls, he words me, that I should not
> Be noble to myself.

And it is this nobility of self that Cleopatra will have. She vividly paints an image of the alternative—slavery to Rome—when to her women she says:

> Saucy lictors
> Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
> Ballad 's out a' tune. The quick comedians
> Extemporally will stage us, and present
> Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' th' posture of a whore.
> (V.ii.214-221)

This ultimate horror Cleopatra and her women reject. Instead they will show Cleopatra "like a queen . . . again for Cydnus to meet Mark Antony." Instead of slave, Cleopatra will be queen. Further, for one moment she disavows her womanliness, a condition which would leave her vulnerable to Octavius, when she says:

> My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
> Of woman in me; now from head to foot
> I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon
> No planet is of mine.
> (V.ii.238-241)

In denying her womanhood, she denies mortality: she has "immortal longings." And Shakespeare allows her one wish denied to her in life. "Husband, I come!" she says. Their marriage is not of this world, but in the eternal world beyond the conflicting cultures of Rome and Egypt, and beyond the code of masculine control of Octavius. In Cleopatra Shakespeare has at last created a woman of equal authority to man, who, with her death, has "Caesar beguil'd." When the second guard asks, "Is this well done?" Charmian answers, "It is well done, and fitting for a princess / Descended of so many royal kings." Even Caesar admits her royalty when he says:

> Bravest at the last,
> She levell'd at our purposes, and being royal
> Took her own way.

And one fitting image of royalty remains: of Charmian, the first guard says,

> I found her trimming up the diadem
> On her dead mistress;

The feminine authority of one queen was allowed to stay. In Cleopatra Shakespeare found a wanton and made her a wife: she remains his most queenly creation.

On a close reading of the play, one discovers that Cleopatra is not only Queen of Egypt, but is repeatedly compared as well to the goddess Isis: "She / In the habiliments of the goddess Isis / That day appear'd" (III.vi.16-17). Thus the weight of a conflicting culture is strengthened and made to contrast with the predominantly masculine culture of Rome which Octavius represents. It is this clash of cultures, moreover, which raises what may first appear as a tragic tale of love to a cosmic war between the values of the East and the Occidental.

The first reference to Isis appears in Act One, scene two, when in her exchange with the soothsayer and Iras, Charmian invokes her as a feminine deity:

> Our worser thoughts heavens mend! Alexas,—come, his fortune, his fortune! O, let him marry a woman that cannot go, sweet Isis, I beseech thee, and let her die too, and give him a worse, and let worse follow worse, till the worst of all follow him laughing to his grave, fifty-fold a

> cuckold! Good Isis, hear me this prayer, though thou deny me a matter of more weight: good Isis, I beseech thee!
>
> (I.ii.59-66)

The gloss on "Isis" in the Arden edition tells us that she is "originally the Egyptian goddess of the earth and fertility, later of the moon. See Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, V.vii.4:—

> 'They wore rich Mitres shaped like the Moone,
> To shew that *Isis* doth the Moone portend;
> Like as *Osyris* signifies the Sunne.'[6]

But Spenser is not the only literary source of the period. According to Michael Lloyd in "Cleopatra As Isis," *Shakespeare Survey* 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), "Plutarch's account of Isis and Osiris was published in Philemon Holland's translation of the *Moralia* in 1603, and a reading of Holland's text encourages the view that Shakespeare had read it, and was echoing it in parts of the play" (21). Harold Fisch in "'Antony and Cleopatra': The Limits of Mythology," *Shakespeare Survey* 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) agrees, and gives a summary of Shakespeare's probable sources of the Isis-Osiris myth when he says:

> Shakespeare could have gathered his knowledge of the myth from a number of sources. It seems natural to suppose that he drew on Plutarch's *Of Isis and Osiris* (still to this day the chief source of our information on the subject) since he had made use of Plutarch's *Lives* as the chief source for the play as a whole, and Philemon Holland had translated a version of this in 1603. He could also have read an account of the appearance of Isis and Osiris in Spenser. But a particularly tempting possibility is that he had read all about the goddess Isis in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* which had reached four editions in the English translation of Adlington by the end of the sixteenth century" (61).

The translation of Plutarch's *Moralia* (1603) in which *Of Isis and Osiris* is found is lengthy and involved in philosophical considerations. Interspersed with questions of natural science is the tale itself. One moving passage, which recounts Isis's search for the body of Osiris may furnish an example of Holland's style:

> And so soone as she came unto a solitary place, where she was by herself alone, she opened the coffer, where finding the corps of *Osiris*, she

> laid her face close to his, embraced it and wept. [Then Typhon] fortuned as he hunted in a cleere moone-shine night to meet with it, and taking knowledge of the body, cut it up into foure teene peeces and flung them heere and there one from the other: which when Isis understood, she searched for them in a bote or punt made of papyr reed, all over the moores and marishes: whereof, it comes that the Crocodiles never hurt those who faile or row in vessels made of that plant, whether it be that they are afraid of it, or reverence it for this goddesse sake I know not. And thus you may know the reason, why there be found many sepulcres of Osiris in the country of Aegypt, for ever as she found any peece of hom, she caused a tombe to be made for it:[7]

The pathos of this incident, delivered in rather circuitous fashion by Holland, is later to be made magnificent in Shakespeare's verse when he, in effect, allows Cleopatra to piece together the heroic image of her lost Antony. In imagining him grander than he had been in life, Cleopatra shows a striking resemblance to Plutarch's Isis. Fisch notes this similarity when he says that Antony's immortality "is achieved especially in the speeches of Cleopatra as she mourns over the mutilated Antony-Osiris, in this re-enacting perfectly the classic pose of Isis whose long lament over the dead Osiris is recorded by Plutarch" (p. 63). Further, Fisch maintains that Shakespeare is deliberately creating an

> Isis-Osiris-Set triangle with Cleopatra functioning as goddess of nature and fertility, and Antony as Osiris, the dying Sun-god who is resurrected in eternity. Octavius Caesar seems in some sense to function as Set (or Typhon) the brother of Osiris who seeks to replace him with Isis, only to be thwarted by Isis who gathers the mangled remains of Osiris together and thus guarantees that he becomes immortal and reigns as king of the underworld (61).

Another probable source, as mentioned earlier, is William Adlington's translation of *The Golden Asse* by Apuleius, which was "'translated out of Latine into Englishe'" and "dated from the already venerable walls of University College, 18th September 1566."[8] The reference to Isis comes at the end of the eleventh book when, after praying to her for divine protection, Apuleius sees her in a dream-vision. The description of Isis is so vivid, that I would like to quote it at some length:

> When I had ended this orayson, and discovered my plaintes to the Goddesse, I fortuned to fall a sleepe, and by and by appeared to me a divine and venerable face, worshipped even by the Goddes them selves: wherefore I purpose to describe her divine semblaunce, if the povertie of my humaine speach will suffer me, or her divine power give me eloquence therto. First she had a great abondance of heare, disparsed and scattered about her necke, on the crowne of her head she bare many garlandes enterlaced with flowres, in the middle of her head she bare many garlandes enterlaced with flowres, in the middle of her forehead, was a compasse in fashion of a glasse, or sembling the light of the moone, in one of her handes she bare serpentes, in the other blades of corne. . . . Thus the divine shape breathing out the pleasant spice of fertil Arabia, dayned not with her divine voice to utter these woordes unto me: Beholde Lucius I am come, thy weeping and prayers hath moved me to succour thee, I am she that is the natural mother of all thinges. . . . (259).

Here, in an epiphany, we find the chief adornments which Shakespeare used to link Cleopatra with the goddess Isis: the moon, the serpent, and her claim to be the "natural mother of all thinges." Further, she is the queen of queens, known to differing cultures by various names, but to the Egyptians and to Apuleius she is Isis, the most noble of all.

> . . . my divinitie, is adored throughout all the world, in divers manners, in variable customes, and in many names, for the Phrigiens call me the mother of the Goddes: The Atheniens, Minerve: the Cipriens, Venus: the Candians, Diana: the Sicilians, Proserpina: the Eleusians, Ceres: some Juno, other Bellona, other Hecate; and principally the Ethiopians whiche dwell in the Orient, and the Egiptians whiche are excellent in all kinde of auncient doctrine, and by their propre ceremonies accustome to woorshippe me, doo call me Queene Isis: (260).[9]

Further, in Philemon Holland's translation of Plutarch, we find a similar passage:

> *Isis* is the president over amatorious folke. . . . For *Isis* the feminine part of nature, apt to receive all generation, upon which ocasion called she is by *Plato*, the nurse and *Pandeches*, that is to say, capable of all: yea and the common sort name her *Myrionymus*, which is as much to say, as having an infinite number of names, for that she receiveth all formes and shapes, according as it pleaseth that first reason to convert and tune here. Moreover, there is imprinted in her naturally, a love of the first and principall essence, which is nothing else but the sovereign good, and it she desireth, seeketh, and pursueth after (1308-9).

In linking Cleopatra with Isis, Shakespeare allowed her a status unknown to his other heroines, for she alone contains within herself the elements of feminine autonomy. There have been other queens—Hermione to name but one—who were royal by birth as well as by marriage. But none, as far as I can determine, had royalty rooted in a culture which allowed true equal authority to feminine deities.

In the masculine world of Rome, Antony is identified with at least three figures: Mars, Hercules and Bacchus, who is also associated with Osiris. And, according to Ted Hughes, "because Cleopatra is the avatar of Isis, and she presents herself and is understood to be, Antony has become the avatar of Osiris—the Egyptian Dionysus, the African Bacchus, the black Adonis."[10]

Cleopatra makes no such shift—she is forever Egypt, Isis, although having "an infinite number of names." Without understanding the implications of Cleopatra's association with Isis, one cannot see how she transcends the strictures of Elizabethan *exempla*. For it is she alone who successfully defies the masculine control of Rome, largely because she has the weight of another culture which recognizes the existence of goddesses, as well as gods, to back her. And, if the early Christians had not been antagonistic towards the cult of Isis, the Judaeo-Christian biblical pronouncement, "He created them male and female" might have had new meaning of equal authority for both sexes.

Out of the Egyptian culture Shakespeare found the missing link to the mystery of the female principle and fashioned Cleopatra first as a wanton, then as a wife, and finally, into an "eastern star." If her entrance is enigmatic, her exit is an epiphany.

Notes

1 Barbara Everett, "Much Ado About Nothing," *The Critical Quarterly*, III, No. 4 (Winter 1961), 334.

2 D. S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, Especially 'Harley Lyrics,' Chaucer, and Some Elizabethans," *Modern Language Review*, L (1955), 269.

3 Lady Antonia Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 417.

4 Franklin M. Dickey, "The Elizabethans' *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Antony and Cleopatra: A Casebook*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Macmillan, 1968), 147-148.

5 F. N. Robinson, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 494. I refer to the "G" text.

6 The "character" of the milkmaid which served as an emblem for the period can be found in Sir Thomas Overbury, "A Fair and Happy Milkmaid," *Seventeenth-Century Verse and Prose*, ed. Helen White, Ruth Wallerstein, and Ricardo Quintana (New York: Macmillan, 1951), I, 163. "The lining of her apparell (which is her selfe) is far better then outsides of *Tissew*: for though shee bee not arraied in the spoile of the Silke-worme, shee is deckt in *innocencie*, a far better wearing."

7 M. R. Ridley, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra* (London: Methuen, 1954), 15.

8 Philemon Holland, trans., *Moralia*, by Plutarch (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1603), 1294.

9 William Adlington, trans., *The Golden Asse of Apuleius*, with an introduction by Thomas Seccombe (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. v.

10 Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and The Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 315.

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Hansen, Carol, 1938-

Woman as individual in
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A critical analysis of the position of women in English Renaissance drama, this book examines the impact of male domination in the drama and non-dramatic treatises of the day and scrutinizes the kaleidoscopic images of women found in selected plays of Shakespeare, Webster, and Middleton. The book shows how the masculine code led to disintegration, defiance, and death for women, and to madness for men. Set against a generalized image of archetypal Eve, woman nevertheless could emerge as an individual, as a "splendid fighter for self."

Carol Hansen teaches English at City College of San Francisco and College of San Mateo. She received a B.A. in English from San Jose State University, an M.A. from the University of California at Berkeley, and a Ph.D. from Arizona State University. Recipient of an English-Speaking Union Fellowship, she did research for this book at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, England.